

DORMITORY No. 19

OR, THE MYSTERY OF ST. MEREDITH'S

BY

FREDA RUSSELL

(Author of "The Island School")



THE PILGRIM PRESS,
16, PILGRIM STREET, LONDON, E.C.4

PRINTED BY
THE CLASSIC COLOUR PRESS
READING



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CHAPTER I.

BACK TO SCHOOL.

“**H**ERE she comes! Here she comes!
Goodness, what a crowd!”

There was a little buzz of excitement among the group of girls on the jetty as the school-launch *Ariadne*, appeared round the easterly point of the island, filled to overflowing with a human freight. For it was the opening day of the autumn term, and Fairby Island was astir with that pleasant hum of activity which marks the reassembling of a large and popular girls' school.

There was much speculation as to who might be on board, for this was the third boat-load to arrive that day, and many more trips would have to be made between Fairby and the

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mainland before St. Meredith's hundred and sixty girls, with their boxes and trunks, dress-cases, handbags, umbrellas, mackintoshes, and other impedimenta could be landed on the island which, for the next three months, was to be their home.

Rapidly the launch approached the jetty, and there was much waving of handkerchiefs as the girls on shore began to recognise old friends among the passengers.

"Ivy! Beryl!" shouted a sturdy, dark-haired maiden, who, perched on the very end of the jetty, was waving with such energy that she almost overbalanced.

"Hullo, Marion!" came the reply, scarcely heard above the tumult of greeting which arose as the launch drew alongside.

"Don't be in a 'urry, miss; wait till she's made fast!" shouted the distracted boatman. "Lumme, Joe!" he added, addressing the man at the helm, "we weren't in such a 'urry to get to school in our young days, were we?"

"You bet we weren't!" agreed his mate, a kindly, grey-bearded old man with a twinkling eye. "But things is different now. We 'ad to *work* in them days, we did, when we went to school."

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A roar of protest rose from the girls.

"We *do* work," they declared.

"We work jolly hard; you ought to come and see us!" declared Cecily Woodward, as with the old man's help she stepped on to the landing stage.

"I'd like to," he replied, smiling, and turned his attention to the unloading of his cargo.

For some minutes the little jetty was so crowded with friends, all busy exchanging greetings, that the men could not get ashore with the baggage, but after a time the girls began to move off and wend their way in twos and threes towards the wooded rise above which appeared the grey stone tower of St. Meredith's.

"Why, Ivy, you haven't changed a bit!" declared Marion; "you're just as plump and rosy as ever!"

"And she's been spending all the hols. trying to get thin!" laughed Beryl, whose own willow-like figure was the perpetual envy of her chum. "She's tried running, skipping, dancing, swimming, physical jerks—everything except eating less!"

Ivy smiled good-naturedly, and tried to

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think of a suitable rejoinder, but couldn't, so she contented herself with inquiring whether Marion had had a good time.

"Not too bad," replied Marion; "but I'm glad to get back. I used to think that nothing ever happened at school; but it's ten times worse at home."

Marion's thirst for adventure was insatiable. She was for ever wishing that she had been born a boy, so that she could have run away to sea.

"We're still in Number 34, I suppose?" asked Beryl, as they began to make a move shorewards.

"No; isn't it a shame! We're in nineteen now. I don't know who's got thirty-four."

"What's nineteen like?"

"Oh, it's one of the bigger dormies. Holds five; us and two novies. There's a list of our names up."

"What are the names of the others?" asked Ivy.

"Rita Priest and Barbara Wood," replied Marion. "I don't think they've turned up yet."

Ivy noticed two girls standing apart from the rest, and looking exceedingly nervous and

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ill-at-ease. She went up to them with a reassuring smile.

"I expect you're new, aren't you?" she inquired. "My name's Ivy Morland. What's yours?"

"Barbara Wood," said one.

"And is this your friend, Rita?" asked Ivy, indicating the rather small girl by her side.

"No," said Barbara. "I haven't a friend. I'm alone."

The small girl in question proved to be a junior, named Joyce Dawson.

"Was someone asking for me?" inquired a bright little person with fair bobbed hair, who had been in animated conversation with the skipper of the launch. "My name's Rita—Rita Priest."

"Oh, good," said Ivy. "You're in our dormitory—you and Barbara. I don't know where you are, Joyce, but we'll find out. Come along."

Beryl and Marion having been introduced to the new arrivals, the six wended their way towards the school.

"Is Miss Rawlins coming back this term?" inquired Beryl.

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“Yes,” replied Marion. “She’s here. Oh, and there’s a new French mistress—Made-moiselle Frogart.”

“What’s she like?” asked Ivy.

In reply Marion made a face that hardly indicated approval.

“Of course,” she explained, “you can’t really tell when you’ve only seen a person for five minutes; but if first impressions are anything to go by I’m going to detest her.”

The doings of the long summer holidays provided a plentiful topic of conversation, and there were many things to be explained to the new girls, so that almost before they realised it they had covered the half-mile from the jetty, and were crossing the quadrangle towards the main entrance of St. Meredith’s. The Headmistress, Miss Tonks, was there to greet them, while the matron was busy directing the girls to their new dormitories, and taking in hand the fresh arrivals.

“Well, Beryl, I’m glad to see you back, and you, too, Ivy,” said Miss Tonks, as she shook hands. “Have you had a good holiday?”

Ivy replied that they had, and introduced the new girls, after which they handed Joyce

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over to the matron and proceeded in search of Dormitory Nineteen.

The school meals, on the opening day of term, were always a little informal. The girls sat where they liked, and talked to their hearts' content without any calls to order from the prefects. The mistresses, too, were always more genial than usual, and the whole affair savoured more of a picnic than a formal meal.

On this occasion Miss Tonks sat at the head of the mistresses' table, as usual; but her manner was somewhat preoccupied, and she wore a worried look. On her right was the new French mistress, Mlle. Frogart, obviously self-conscious, but trying her hardest to appear at ease. The remaining mistresses, and the matron, sat in no particular order round the table, engaged in animated conversation.

Mlle. Frogart was the subject of much interested comment on the part of the girls. Generally speaking, the impression she created was unfavourable. A pair of small grey eyes looked out from a pallid countenance, which bore no particular trace of age and yet did not look young. She was not stout,

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but her figure lacked any sort of natural slimness, and her hair was a "dull, doormat colour," as Marion put it, without gloss or lustre. Altogether, the effect was one of artificiality.

"I can't help thinking that Froggy and I will fall out sooner or later," observed Ivy, after contemplating the French mistress steadily for some minutes.

Mlle. Frogart could not possibly have heard the remark, and yet at that very moment she raised her eyes and regarded Ivy with a curious intentness.

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CHAPTER II.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MR. ENDERBY.

"I wonder what's wrong with Tonky," observed Beryl, as she proceeded to arrange a cherished assortment of photographs along the dormitory mantelpiece ; "she looks frightfully worried."

"You'd look worried," replied Marion, "if you were expecting to be chucked out of your house at any minute."

"What on earth are you talking about ?" demanded Ivy, looking at Marion as though she had taken leave of her senses.

"Do you mean she's going to get the sack ?" suggested Beryl.

"No," said Marion ; "there's no one to give her the sack now that Mr. Enderby's gone, is there ?"

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"Well, then, who's going to chuck her out?" inquired Ivy. "You're talking through your hat!"

"No, I'm not!" retorted Marion. "And it isn't just Tonky—it's all of us."

Rita and Barbara stared at Marion with a puzzled expression. They were vaguely suspicious that this was a lead-up to some piece of leg-pulling which, as new girls, they expected to undergo. But clearly Ivy and Beryl were as much at a loss to understand Marion's cryptic remarks as they were themselves.

"I heard all about it coming over on the launch this morning," began Marion, gloating over the interest she had aroused. "Tonky'd been to meet some of the mistresses, and was telling them about it on the boat. You see, this place belonged to Mr. Enderby, and when he disappeared, Tonky and the others decided to carry it on by themselves as a sort of—well, —you know—company, or something; a 'trust' I think they called it. Only it didn't belong to them—the property, I mean—and they had to apply to the court for it. But the deeds and things couldn't be found, and so the school was just allowed to stay on here

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till Mr. Enderby turns up—which he won't do ; but, of course, he's got the deeds and can sell the place if he likes, and if he does, out we go ! ” And to give point to her remarks, Marion illustrated the ejection by picking up and “ chucking out ” an imaginary intruder.

“ Who's Mr. Enderby ? ” asked Barbāra, timidly.

“ And how did he disappear ? ” added Rita.

“ Of course,” said Marion, turning to Ivy, “ I forgot these kids were new. They won't know what happened last term. You'd better tell them, Ivy ; I hardly know where to begin. Besides, you did it—you and Beryl.”

“ Well,” began Ivy, seating herself on the bed, “ Mr. Enderby—the Rev. Erasmus Enderby—was principal of St. Meredith's ever since it was started four or five years ago.”

“ It looks a much older place than that,” observed Rita, sitting on the bed opposite.

“ Oh, it's centuries old ; it used to be a monastery,” replied Ivy ; “ but it's only been a school since Mr. Enderby bought it.”

“ Did he buy the whole island ? ”

“ Yes, and kept half to himself ; that half

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was right out of bounds to all of us. So was the north tower, over there. He was frightfully strict about it, and two girls at least got sent home for breaking the out-of-bounds rule. We couldn't make out why he was so fussy; but we were told he wrote books and wanted to be quiet. Well, being new girls, we got all sorts of tricks played on us, and one night some of the others took me over to the north tower, and shut me in so that one of them could pretend to be a ghost, and frighten me."

"Yes; and she fell down the stairs and broke her arm—and serve her right!" interposed Beryl, who had never forgiven them for the trick played on her friend.

"Well, anyway," continued Ivy, "I found out that there was something going on in that tower that I couldn't understand, nor could Beryl. So we went exploring whenever we got a chance, and after a lot of searching we found a secret door right at the top of the tower, all covered with artificial creeper. So I kept guard at the bottom while Beryl tried to open the door. She got in all right, but she couldn't get out because the door slammed and locked her in."

"Oh, it was awful," said Beryl, taking up

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the narrative. "I didn't know what to do. There were two other doors, but they were both locked, and I started looking round for a key. I found I was in a sort of lab., with bottles of chemicals and things, and a printing press, and heaps of paper cut up the size of bank-notes. But I couldn't see any key, and while I was still looking I heard men's voices, and got into a cupboard to hide."

Rita and Barbara were sitting side by side on the bed, listening intently. They couldn't quite make up their minds whether the story was true or whether Beryl was inventing it.

"Well, I'd only just pulled the door to," continued Beryl, "when three men came in, and from their conversation I knew at once that they were forgers—printing fake money, and sending it abroad. I looked through the crack to see what they were like, and who do you think I saw?"

Neither Rita nor Barbara ventured a suggestion, though they both felt they knew.

"Why, Mr. Enderby himself, and the two men from the launch."

"Not the dear old chap with the whiskers?" exclaimed Rita, remembering her conversation with the skipper of the *Ariadne*.

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“ No ; they’re new,” said Beryl. “ The others are in gaol. They were ex-convicts, and they looked it, in spite of their disguise.”

“ I should have died of fright ! ” declared Barbara.

“ I nearly did,” confessed Beryl ; “ at least, I nearly died of suffocation, and I got pins and needles all up my leg till I couldn’t keep it still any longer, and I tried to stretch it out and knocked over a bottle.”

Barbara’s eyes looked ready to start out of her head.

“ Whatever happened ? ” she asked.

“ I hardly know,” said Beryl, “ except that they dragged me out and threatened to kill me ; and I think they meant it, only Rupert Humphrey—that was Mr. Enderby’s real name—locked me in a small room and kept me prisoner.”

“ And there was I,” said Ivy, “ waiting down below, wondering what on earth had become of her. And at last she threw a note down telling me she was locked in, and I got quite frightened and went to Mr. Enderby’s for help, and when I’d rung at the door I looked round and saw Beryl sliding down a rope from the window.”

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"I'd cut Mr. Enderby's carpet up for a rope," explained Beryl. "It did finely."

"Fancy you having the nerve!" said Rita, admiringly.

"What, to cut Mr. Enderby's carpet up?"

"No; to climb down that rope."

"I hadn't, really," confessed Beryl; "but I was desperate, and had to do something. I could never do it again."

"Didn't they come after you?" inquired Barbara.

"Yes, rather!" replied Beryl; "but we borrowed their launch—they kept it up a creek quite close to the tower—and got away just in time."

"It ended up all right, though," continued Ivy. "We were picked up by a barge and taken to Tilbury, and there the captain telephoned to Scotland Yard, and a detective came down and brought us back here with him. They had quite a little siege of the north tower, and in the end two of the men surrendered, but Mr. Enderby got away and disappeared."

"I saw him put off from the island in a canoe, though I didn't know who it was at the time," said Marion, anxious to claim her

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one little bit of the adventure. "I'm certain he was drowned; the sea was awfully rough. He couldn't have got across."

"Even if he was, it doesn't help much, if he had the deeds with him," observed Rita.

"I suppose it doesn't," admitted Marion. "Anyway, that's why Tonky's looking worried; and I don't see that we can do anything."

Beryl thought for a minute.

"We can make a thorough search for the deeds," she said. "Up in the tower, I mean, and in the boat-house, and places other people wouldn't think of looking in."

"I expect they've looked everywhere they can think of already," said Ivy.

"Yes; but not everywhere we can think of," replied Beryl.

Marion didn't consider there was much hope of finding anything.

"Besides," she pointed out, "Tonky'd only think we were interfering, and tell us to mind our own business."

"Oh, we wouldn't tell anyone," explained Beryl. "We'd do it all quietly, on our own, so that nobody could laugh at us if we had to give it up."

In the end it was decided to adopt Beryl's

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suggestion and to commence with the north tower as soon as possible. The difficulty was to find an opportunity for doing so without attracting attention. A proposal for an expedition after dark was dismissed, on the grounds that they would have to take a light, which might easily be seen, and also that it was too big a risk to take so early in the term.

"What about early morning?" suggested Barbara.

This, indeed, appeared to be the only practicable solution, and it was agreed that they should get up early the following morning and carry out their explorations in time to get back before the rising-bell summoned the school to activity.

With a pleasant sense of impending adventure, they finished their unpacking and retired to bed.

"Concentrate upon five o'clock," said Ivy, "then we're sure to wake up in time."

When, however, the rising-bell went, some nine hours later, all five occupants of No. 19 were still snug and warm between the blankets, sleeping the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER III.

A SELF-HELP PARTY.

"You're all invited to a party!" announced Beryl, bursting into No. 19 in great excitement.

"Who by?"

"When?"

"Where?"

"In No. 27. It's a self-help party, and it starts right away."

"What's a self-help party?"

"Come along and you'll see," said Beryl.

"Who's giving it?" asked Ivy.

"Ruth Simmons," was the reply.

The mention of Ruth's name was the signal for an outburst of derisive laughter, for that young lady had earned for herself the unenviable reputation of being the greediest girl in the school. She was not merely always hungry, like Ivy, but never by any chance

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did she invite the other girls to share the contents of her frequent tuck-boxes from home.

"D'you mean we're going to raid her room?" inquired Marion, who had often longed to take drastic action in the matter.

"Not exactly," replied Beryl; "but we're going to have a picnic all the same."

"How do you know?" asked Ivy.

"Well, I met Mandy Brewer just now," said Beryl. "She's sharing Ruth's dormy, and she says Ruth's only waiting for her to be out of the way to open a big box of tuck she brought with her from home. So, as Mandy's going along to her pals in No. 35 to-night, and Ruth knows she's going, she reckons it'll come as a heaven-sent opportunity. And, of course, Ruth'll need some help. That's where *we* come in."

Rita's eyes sparkled at the thought.

"Are we 'invited,' too?" she asked.

"Yes, of course!" said Beryl. "Buck up!"

Beryl led the way down the corridor, and up the stairs at the end, then, turning sharp to the right, she halted before the door of No. 27. Turning the handle quietly she peeped inside. There was nobody in the room

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and she went in, beckoning to the others to follow.

It was the usual type of small dormitory, with two beds, a chest of drawers which also served as a dressing-table, and one chair. In the far corner of the room a recess had been curtained off, providing a fairly roomy "hanging wardrobe." Somewhat conspicuously in front of the fireplace rested a box as to whose contents there could be but little doubt.

As soon as the others had entered, Beryl closed the door, and in a few words she told them what they were to do.

"We're going to hide," she explained, "until Ruth gets going with her picnic. Then we're going to offer our services as guests. There'll be room for Ivy and Marion and me in the wardrobe. Rita, you and Barbara had better get under Mandy's bed. I'll give you the signal when to come out."

She had hardly spoken when a footstep sounded outside, and the handle of the door was turned. There was a wild dash for cover, and Rita bumped her head rather badly against the iron frame of the bed. It was only Mandy, however, who had come to warn them of their hostess's approach.

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"She's coming up the stairs," announced Mandy, breathlessly. "I bunked up to let you know. Hope you have a good feed. So-long!" And with that she swung out of the room, slamming the door behind her. The visitors lost no time in concealing themselves, and half-a-minute later the door again opened and Ruth entered.

Intended by nature to be beautiful, Ruth had, by giving way to appetite and indolence, acquired a pasty complexion and a flabby appearance. Ivy said that she reminded her of Jacob, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage—which saying amused Beryl greatly, coming as it did from Ivy.

It was obvious that nothing was further from Ruth's thoughts than the possibility of disturbance. Indeed, the only things that could be said to be near her thoughts at that moment were contained in the box by the fireplace. Carefully closing the door, she stood for some moments in silent contemplation. Then, taking a key from her pocket, she unfastened the small black padlock and lifted the lid.

From behind the curtain Beryl, who was watching her every movement, caught a

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glimpse of paper shavings, and brightly-coloured packets. A slight smile of anticipation spread over the face of the gourmand, as she proceeded in leisurely fashion to prepare for her solitary feast.

First she spread a large sheet of brown paper on the bed, and over this a serviette, which appeared to have been packed for the purpose. On this improvised table she proceeded to set out some of the contents of the box—mince-pies, sausage rolls, chocolate éclairs, meringues, and a tin of fancy biscuits. Then she sat on the bed and contemplated the feast she had prepared. Something was missing. She got up and rummaged in a corner of the tuck-box, from which she produced a bottle of lemonade crystals. Some of these she dissolved in a glass of water, and then, her preparations complete, settled herself down on the bed and prepared to commence her meal.

She seemed uncertain where to begin, and appeared to be weighing up the respective merits of the sausage rolls and the chocolate éclairs, but at last the honour fell to the sausage rolls, and she devoured one with much relish. She had just come to the last

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mouthful when a slight movement of the curtains in the corner caught her eye. At the same moment, two heads appeared from under the opposite bed. With a little exclamation of astonishment she sprang to her feet.

"What—what are you doing in here?" she demanded.

"We've come to your party," announced Beryl, in a tone of child-like innocence.

"My party? What d'you mean?"

"Aren't you having a party?" asked Ivy, with a meaning glance at the pastries.

"No, and if I was I shouldn't ask you!" retorted their victim.

"Oh, that *does* sound unkind," observed Beryl, as with the deliberate air of one who has come to stay she seated herself on the bed.

The others copied her example, and watched Ruth's movements with exaggerated interest. Ruth began to get ruffled.

"I wish you'd go," she said; "you've no business here."

"Don't let us disturb you," said Beryl. "Please go on with your supper. We've really come to visit Mandy."

"Well, Mandy's not here."

"No; but we don't mind waiting."

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Besides, it'll be company for you. It's awfully lonely having a room like this to yourself—and all those cakes, too!"

"If you think you're going to help yourselves you're jolly well mistaken."

"We wouldn't dream of such a thing," said Ivy. "But if you were to hand them round we wouldn't hurt your feelings by refusing them."

It occurred to Ruth that perhaps the most dignified thing to do would be to ignore the intruders altogether. She turned her back upon them as far as possible, and helped herself to an éclair.

"I'm very fond of éclairs, aren't you, Marion?" remarked Ivy, in a penetrating whisper.

"Yes; but sausage rolls are more in my line," Marion whispered back. "Don't those look nice?"

"There are some more in the box," observed Barbara. "I can see them."

"If you keep sausage rolls too long they go all green inside," said Rita. "Then they're poisonous."

"Oh, they'll get eaten before then, don't you worry," said Beryl, reassuringly.

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The visitors fell to speculating as to what their hostess would choose next.

"The meringues look topping," said Marion, "but they'd be rather rich after éclairs. P'raps she'll eat a mince-pie next."

"Or drink some of that lemonade," suggested Barbara. "Sweet things make one frightfully thirsty."

"It's a treat to see anybody enjoying themselves," declared Beryl. "I almost feel as though I were eating those cakes myself."

"Beasts! Beasts!" cried Ruth, swinging round upon her tormentors. "You're a lot of cads. Get out of here at once!"

"Was she talking to us?" inquired Ivy, in tones of gentle surprise.

"Get out of my room; you've no business here!" Ruth was so angry that her voice rose almost to a shout.

"Barbara, come over here," said Beryl. "Don't you see you're on Miss Simmons' side of the room? It's not polite to stay where you're not wanted."

Barbara traced an imaginary line down the centre of the dormitory, and with elaborate politeness withdrew to the other side.

To Ruth's self-conscious mind it seemed

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as though the dozen or so pastries in front of her had been multiplied by thousands, and a picture she had seen in a book of nursery rhymes long years ago would persist in bobbing up in her imagination. It was a picture of a pig in human attire, with a serviette tied round his neck, sitting up to a table on which was spread just such an assortment as lay before her now.

She paused with a mince-pie half-way to her mouth, and her lip began to quiver. The others were quick enough to see the sign, and something like a twitter escaped from the two younger girls. Ivy quelled them with a quick frown.

There was a moment's silence, then all of a sudden, Ruth burst into tears.

"Oh, you're hateful—hateful!" she sobbed, and buried her face in her handkerchief.

Ivy could not withstand tears. She had a warm, generous heart, which bore no resentment of any kind, and could not bear to see anyone in trouble when she herself was happy. She remembered, too, that Ruth's failing was as much her parents' fault as her own, for Ruth was an only child, and had been badly spoilt. With a warning glance at the

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others, she crossed the room and, sitting down beside the weeping figure, put her arm round her.

"Go away!" sobbed Ruth, wriggling her shoulders. But Ivy stayed where she was.

"Ruth, old girl," she said, "be a sport! We haven't come to eat your cakes, really! But you've got the reputation—well, everybody knows you get lots of things from home, but you never invite your friends to share them."

"I w-would," declared Ruth, between her sobs, "b-but I haven't got any friends."

Ivy was touched by the pathos of this confession, which she knew was true.

"Haven't got any friends!" she exclaimed. "And here you can have five of them for the asking."

At that moment it dawned upon Ruth that there were more important things in life than food—things which she had been missing for years. She continued mopping her eyes, but her anger had passed; she just felt miserable and ashamed.

"Look here," said Beryl, who had been in whispered conversation with the others. "Now we're here, why not make it a real

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party? Put the grub away and let's have games. We shall have to be jolly quiet, because it'll be 'lights out' in five minutes. What about 'consequences'? A candle will do for that."

"I—I don't know how to play it," said Ruth, drying her eyes.

This was an amazing confession; but, after all, a girl who had no friends couldn't be expected to know many games.

"We'll soon show you!" said Marion. "All you want are some pencils and bits of paper."

It was at this point that Ruth surrendered.

"Hadn't we better have supper first?" she said. "There's plenty more in that box."

The others protested that they weren't hungry, and didn't want anything to eat; but Ruth was determined to play her part.

"I'd like you to have supper with me," she said. "Just as though I'd invited you properly."

There are times when it is blessed to receive.

"It's ever so decent of you," said Ivy. "We should love to, really."

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"Let's set it out nicely," said Ruth, warming up to her task. "There's a towel there that'll do for a table-cloth. Will someone pass along the box, please?"

Mandy's eyes opened wide with surprise when, five minutes later, she entered the room on her return from No. 35. A wonderful assortment of pastries, with a large iced cake in the centre, was set out daintily on an improvised table around which were seated Ruth and her five guests, apparently only waiting for a signal to begin.

"Come along, Mandy!" whispered Ruth, eagerly. "We're waiting for you."

* * * * *

It was nearly eleven o'clock before the guests departed, after thanking their hostess in the approved fashion.

"I'm so glad you came," said Ruth. "I'd no idea a party could be so jolly."

"We'll be having one in No. 19 before long," said Ivy. "Will you come?"

"I will if I'm invited," replied Ruth.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF MADEMOISELLE FROGART.

Although the early morning expedition to the north tower, planned for the first morning after arrival, had been unavoidably postponed, the idea was not allowed to drop.

"Let's fix it for to-morrow and get it over," said Ivy, who still held pessimistic views as to its success.

There was general agreement with this proposal, and it was arranged that whoever woke first the following morning should rouse the others.

"Not before half-past five," stipulated Beryl.

This was approved, and the company retired to bed, determined not to be caught napping on a second occasion.

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Ivy was the last to go to sleep. Her mind kept conjuring up visions of Mlle. Frogart and of the curiously intent stare with which she had regarded her at tea on the opening day. Even her dreams were haunted by the French mistress, who seemed to be following her about everywhere, staring, always staring at her in the same penetrating manner. At last, however, the vision of the Frenchwoman disappeared in a jumble of confused ideas, and a dreamless, restful slumber took its place.

* * * * *

As the muffled chimes of the hall clock announced that it was five a.m. Ivy raised her head from the pillow and looked around. All the other occupants of No. 19 were still asleep. It seemed a pity to disturb them—especially for such a fool's errand as their expedition seemed likely to prove. She turned over with the half-intention of going to sleep again and forgetting all about it, but the daylight streaming in through the window, and the lively twittering of the birds outside, combined to dispel all inclination to slumber, and she lay awake, thinking things over.

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The rising bell would go at seven, and they must be back by then. If they were to do any good at all they ought to start out by six. There was plenty of time. She need not disturb the others yet.

She got out of bed and went to the window. It was a glorious morning. The sun shone brightly, while a slight haze softened the outline of the trees in the distance ; the air was still fragrant, and a perfect silence brooded over everything, disturbed only by the singing of the birds.

It was good to be back at school. There was something so familiar and friendly about the place. It had been the scene of so much happiness and so many escapades, and the thought that it might pass into other hands troubled Ivy not a little. She wasn't at all hopeful of finding the missing documents ; but it was at least worth an effort.

Half-past five. It was time to rouse the others. Ivy found it no easy matter to convince them that they had really decided overnight to get up at this unearthly hour. When she quoted to them the proverb concerning the "early bird," they pointed out that the moral of the proverb, from the worm's point

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of view, was a warning against getting up too early. However, she succeeded in the end, and when Gladys, the kitchenmaid, stumbled downstairs at six o'clock to prepare an early cup of tea for the kitchen staff, she was astounded to see five girls tip-toe through the kitchen and out by the back door.

Ivy and her companions crossed the flagged courtyard and followed the gravel path which led round the modern south wing to the front of the school buildings, then, striking across the lawn, still wet with dew, they passed through the gate and between the bushes which screened the entrance to the ruined north tower. The worm-eaten door stood ajar, and as the girls entered a loud twittering arose from the feathered population of its walls. The sun streamed in through the slits in the masonry which served as windows, lighting up with a "dim, religious light" the sombre interior of the ruin.

"Mind these stairs," said Ivy, leading the way. "If you feel giddy, Rita, hang on to me."

They had only just begun their climb when Ivy called a halt.

"Look!" she cried. "Somebody's been here already this morning."

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Sure enough a damp footprint appeared on each step, growing fainter and fainter as the stairs ascended, until at the top it disappeared altogether.

"It's a small foot, anyway," observed Marion; "I wonder whose on earth it can be."

"Someone else on the same job as ourselves," suggested Beryl.

The others weren't inclined to think so, and together they completed their climb. It looked a giddy distance from the gallery to the moss-covered floor below, and Ivy and Beryl gripped the arms of the two younger girls to give them confidence.

The door at the top yielded to a push, and the girls stepped down into the room beyond.

Apart from some empty bottles and a small heap of rubbish, every vestige of equipment had been removed.

Beryl pointed out the cupboard in which she had hidden, and the door by which the men had entered.

"That opens on to a staircase that leads down to the kitchen of what used to be Mr. Enderby's house," she explained. "You can get through to the school that way, but hardly anybody knows it."

"Which was the room they locked you in?" asked Barbara.

"This one to the right," said Beryl. "It's in here that we want to search. I hope it's not locked."

She crossed to the door of the room in question and tried the handle. The next moment the door was flung open from within, and the astonished face of Mlle. Frogart confronted the intruders.

"You girls!" she exclaimed. "Why are you here? It is out of bounds."

From the inner room there came the smell of burning paper.

"We're just exploring," said Beryl, lamely.

"You know well zat it is forbidden to come here; it is out of bounds. I shall report you to Miss Tonks."

There was a moment's awkward silence; nobody seemed to know exactly what to say or do. Marion was the first to collect her thoughts. She was no great respecter of persons—particularly persons she disliked—and remembering the maxim that attack is the best defence, she rounded upon the French mistress. "For that matter, what are you doing here?" she demanded.

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It was a colossal piece of cheek on her part, and Mademoiselle Frogart was furious.

"*C'est mon affaire !*" she exclaimed. "Go back at once. I shall report you ; you shall see !"

It was obvious that they could not carry out their search with Mademoiselle Frogart present, so at a signal from Ivy they withdrew. It was a tame and undignified ending, but there was nothing else to do. At the door of the stone staircase they held a brief consultation.

"We can't do nothing for two hours," said Ivy, "and there's no point in going back to bed. Let's go for a walk."

"Of course, there's the boathouse," Beryl reminded her ; "but it's rather an unlikely place."

"I'll tell you what——" began Marion ; but at that moment Rita, who was standing behind her, gave her a nudge.

"Froggy's watching us," she whispered.

Glancing upward, the girls saw the face of Mlle. Frogart peering down at them from the gallery. Without another word, they turned and left the tower, closing the oak door behind them.

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Ivy led the way through the bushes until they came to a footpath.

“This runs right through the woods,” she said, “and comes out on the shore opposite Little Shelby. Let’s go for a walk.”

The others readily agreed, and together they set off along the woodland track. It was much overgrown, and the party was continually having to stop to disentangle stockings or tunics from the brambles, which seemed to over-run everything. Now and then they would pause, too, to listen to the sounds of the forest—the faint rustling of millions of leaves, the sudden scurrying of a rabbit, the clear-toned song of a thrush. Once, as they stood listening, they noticed a squirrel leaping from bough to bough above them. He seemed in a playful mood, for he started picking off leaves and most deliberately dropping them down on the intruders.

“Cheeky little fellow!” exclaimed Barbara; but at the sound of a human voice he sprang lightly away, and disappeared in the leafy depths of the wood.

The farther they went, the less distinct became the track, until they had, at length, to guess their direction and force a pathway

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for themselves through the undergrowth. At last, however, somewhat scratched and dishevelled, they found themselves on the outskirts of the wood, and saw before them a stretch of shingle sloping down to the clear blue water of the bay. By this time all of them were feeling warm with their exertion, and the sea looked cool and alluring.

"Doesn't the water look tempting?" said Ivy. "What about a paddle?"

The idea seemed to appeal to everyone, and taking off their shoes and stockings, they paddled to their hearts' content, afterwards basking in the morning sun until their legs were dry.

"I can hardly realise we're back at school," said Marion.

"You'll realise it well enough when Tonky gets hold of us after breakfast!" observed Beryl.

"D'you think Froggy's really going to report us, then?"

"Of course; why shouldn't she?"

"Oh, she may, of course; but I've a sort of an idea that she won't."

Ivy consulted her watch and jumped to her feet.

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"Talking of breakfast," she said, "d'you realise it's half-past seven; brekker in half-an-hour, and all that way to get back?"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Marion. "Here we've been lazing about as though we'd all the day before us. Now we've done it; we'll never get back by eight!"

It was clearly inadvisable to go back the same way that they had come, for that would mean emerging from the tower entrance in full view of the school. It was decided, therefore, to alter their direction and strike inland, so as to come out into the open somewhere beyond the playing fields. It was slow going, for they had to make their path as they went, but at last they reached the barbed wire fence which separated the woodland from the open country beyond.

"We've got twelve minutes," announced Ivy. "We can just do it if we run all the way."

Ten minutes later they were panting across the tennis courts to the accompaniment of the breakfast-bell. There was no time to tidy up. Making straight for the dining-hall, they were just able to scramble into their places before grace was said.

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All through the meal Ivy and Beryl did their best to avoid meeting Mlle. Frogart's glance. Marion, who was not so sensitive, noticed that Mlle. Frogart seemed equally anxious to avoid theirs. Rita and Barbara, anticipating trouble with their new Headmistress, made a very poor breakfast; even Beryl was not quite so "bubbly" as usual; and when, at the end of the meal, Miss Tonks rose in her place with a glance in their direction, even Marion's assurance began to ebb.

But Miss Tonks merely called for "silent grace," and the school rose to its feet, stood for a few moments in reverent silence, and then, at a signal from the Headmistress, dispersed. Nor was any mention made of the incident throughout the day, so that by evening it became apparent that, for reasons best known to herself, the French mistress had allowed the matter to remain dark.

"Decent of her not to say anything, wasn't it?" observed Barbara, when the five had retired to their dormitory for the night.

"H'm!" said Marion. "I don't imagine it was any sense of decency that stopped her."

"I saw what she was doing," said Beryl. "She was burning letters."

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CHAPTER V.

A MOONLIGHT REHEARSAL.

"D'you ever get up anything here?" asked Barbara, one evening, when they were all somewhat at a loss for an occupation between prep. and supper.

"What d'you mean—'get up anything'?" inquired Beryl.

"Why, entertainments, and things of that sort."

"Of course. Haven't you seen the term plan? There's a school concert at the end of every autumn term."

"Yes, I know; but I mean the girls themselves. Don't they ever get up any private entertainments of their own? At my last school we used to have quite exciting entertainments, all kept a secret until a day or two before they were to happen. And then

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we'd borrow one of the big classrooms and invite our friends. It was great fun."

"But that was at a day school," objected Ivy, putting down her book to join in the conversation. "You can't do that sort of thing at a boarding school. What about the rehearsals?"

"I don't know," said Marion, who saw possibilities in the suggestion. "We could do quite a lot of rehearsing in the dormy. There's no need to make a noise."

"What songs and things?" demanded Ivy. "How can you practise them without making a noise?"

"Well, you and Beryl know lots of things to sing without any practice," said Rita. "Besides, you can go over them quietly, without a piano. Miss Farrow says that's the best way to practise singing, because it trains your ear."

"What else should we have besides singing?" asked Ivy.

"I could recite," suggested Marion.

"And what could you do, Rita?"

"Well, I could recite, too; but you won't want more than one," said Rita, rather disappointedly.

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"Oh, I don't know that that matters," said Marion, but her tone was doubtful.

"Five of us aren't really enough," said Beryl, "not to do the thing properly. We ought to get some of the others in, but we don't want a whole crowd."

"I know—Ruth and Mandy!" suggested Barbara.

"Ruth?" exclaimed Marion. "Why, nobody'd come to the show if Ruth was in it; she's not a bit popular."

"No; but she will be before we've finished with her," declared Ivy, whose observant eye had noticed something of a sea-change in that young lady since the night of the self-help picnic. "Good idea, Barbara, we'll ask Ruth and Mandy."

In matters of this kind Ivy usually had her own way, and so in the end it was agreed that the girls in question should be invited to take part and that a meeting should be called to discuss what form the entertainment was to take.

Ruth and Mandy accepted with alacrity, and the following evening they joined the others in Dormitory Nineteen to decide upon a programme and to consider how best the secret rehearsals could be carried out.

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"We've got two or three items already," announced Ivy, who was acting as a sort of unofficial chairman. "Beryl's going to sing one of the Indian Love Lyrics; Marion's going to recite two of Hilaire Belloc's *Cautionary Tales*; and I thought of singing *Love's Old Sweet Song*, with all of you joining in the chorus. What can you do, Ruth?"

Ruth hesitated.

"I can dance," she said, half-apologetically.

"Dance!" The idea of Ruth dancing was too ridiculous. Ruth the sluggish, Ruth the pasty-faced—dance? Only a kind of innate courtesy prevented the others from laughing outright.

"D'you mean comic dances?" asked Marion, quite seriously.

"No," she said, colouring; "ordinary solo dances and that sort of thing. I thought—I thought p'raps I could teach Rita and Barbara, and we could do a turn together."

There was some sense in this suggestion. Rita, the light and airy, and Barbara with her classical little face and trim figure—they were just the dancing type, and if Ruth could teach them, well and good. Perhaps, thought Marion, Ruth would content herself with the

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task of instructress. So the idea was approved.

Rita and Barbara had already decided between them to do a dialogue, and the three elder girls offered to sing *Three Little Maids*, from the *Mikado*. There remained only Mandy.

"We ought to have something humorous," said Ivy. "Mandy, can you sing comic songs?"

But Mandy couldn't. She could neither sing, recite, nor dance.

"Can you play the banjo, or violin, or anything?"

Mandy shook her head.

"Well, then, you'll just have to act as prompter and programme-seller, and things of that sort," said Ivy.

"I can do dumb-show," ventured Mandy.

"What sort of dumb-show?"

"Well, mimicking people, you know."

To confirm her statement, Mandy gave a very passable imitation of Miss Tonks presenting the sports prizes. By the way she handled each imaginary prize the others could tell at once whether it was a cricket-ball, tennis-racket, or hockey stick. She finished

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up by untying a non-existent box of chocolates, sampling them, replacing the lid, and presenting the box to Ivy.

"That'll do splendidly," declared Beryl. "Put her down on the programme, Ivy."

"We ought to end up with a play of some kind," said Marion.

Murmurs of approval greeted this proposition.

"What about a bit of Shakespeare?" suggested Barbara.

"No, not Shakespeare," objected Beryl. "It's too much like school. Isn't there a book of plays in the library?"

"There are two," said Marion, who knew the library from top to bottom; "but they're all frowsy stuff—words as long as a donkey's tail, with about as much sense behind them. All argument and dialogue—you know the sort of thing. Besides, they're mostly too long."

"Couldn't we send away for one?" asked Rita.

"We could, but you never know what you're getting," said Marion. "It might be quite unsuitable."

"I know," said Beryl, "why not get Ivy

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to write one specially for the occasion? I'm sure she could if she tried."

Ivy disclaimed any ability as a playwright; but the others caught at the idea, and insisted that Ivy should try what she could do in that direction. In the end she promised to think it over.

"That's all right, then," said Marion. "We've got a programme. Now what about the rehearsals?"

"Hadn't we better fix the day for the concert?" suggested Rita. "We might get permission to use the small lecture-hall; there's a piano there, and a platform."

"There's plenty of time for that," said Beryl. "Let's get the rehearsals going first."

It was agreed that the songs and recitations could be practised *pianissimo* in the dormitory, but a difficulty arose over the dancing.

"We can't possibly make room in here," said Ruth, "unless we pile the beds on top of one another, and then I doubt it."

"Besides, wouldn't they hear us in the room below?" added Barbara.

"They would if Ivy danced," laughed Beryl. "The floor would——"

But her further remarks were cut short by

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a pillow, accurately aimed by the young lady in question.

Ruth went over to the window. It was a perfect night, and the moon was shining brilliantly across the lawn.

"Out of doors would be best," she said. "On a night like this we could practise splendidly, only, of course, it's a bit public down there, and one really needs something firmer than grass to dance on."

"I know!" said Beryl. "The old courtyard. That's not overlooked at all, except by classrooms and the kitchen. We'd be absolutely private there; nobody'd see us, and we could even make a little noise without being heard."

"Good scheme!" said Ruth. "That's the very place."

"What about music?"

"Oh, we'll manage without all right."

"When's the first rehearsal to be?" asked Beryl.

"No time like the present," said Marion. "What about to-night?"

Everyone seemed to be in favour of making an early start, and it was agreed that Ruth and Mandy should call for the others at

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eleven o'clock that same night, provided everything was quiet, and that they should go down by the back staircase to the kitchen entrance and out into the courtyard that way.

A few minutes later the supper-bell went, and the meeting adjourned, but not for long. Punctually at eleven o'clock an almost imperceptible tap on the door of No. 19 announced the arrival of Ruth and Mandy, and the rest of the company, who had been impatiently waiting inside, joined them in the corridor.

Carrying their gym. shoes (for even rubbers can make a certain amount of noise) they crept silently downstairs in their stockinged feet. The door leading to the kitchen was shut, but the handle turned easily and they went in. The moon was shining brilliantly into the room, lighting up the pots and pans with a weird blue light, and casting ghostly shadows on the wall. The girls stopped and put on their shoes ; there was no risk here of being overheard, provided they kept reasonably quiet.

Very gingerly they turned the key of the outer door and stepped out into the courtyard.

" I'll give Rita and Barbara a lesson first," said Ruth. " After that, if you like, I'll teach

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you a Japanese dance that'll go nicely with your song from the *Mikado*."

A murmur of approval went round.

"Rita and Barbara, you watch me; I'll go through our dance first by myself, so that you can see the idea. After that, you can join in and do exactly as I do—one on each side. It's supposed to represent fairies dancing in the moonlight. Now I want you all to count, 'One, two, three, four, *one*, two, three, four,' like that. Count in a loud whisper. That's instead of music."

Ivy and the rest began counting as instructed, keeping strict time.

"A little louder," said Ruth. Then she began to dance.

The others looked on in amazement. Could this indeed be Ruth—the indolent, flabby Ruth of the picnic episode? Yet there she was, pirouetting round the courtyard, light as a feather, graceful as a bird.

So amazed indeed were they that they forgot to count. But Ruth went on, swaying, spinning, flitting hither and thither like an elfin sprite, then pausing for a second in some graceful pose.

Ivy could not help thinking what a perfect

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setting the moonlit courtyard made for such a dance as this, for it was the oldest part of the building, and wore a dreamy, mediæval air which seemed to fit it for a haunt of fairies, elves, and gnomes. In one corner a well, now long disused, was covered over by boards, themselves green with moss. Across the open end of the yard ran a broken-down wall, quaintly picturesque, on which one could well imagine some elfin audience sitting and applauding the antics of their fairy-kind on the stone flags. She noticed the well especially, for the old windlass was still there, eaten with rust, but without rope or bucket. It must have been hundreds of years old. What a link with the past !

The others seemed to be thinking the same kind of thing, for they watched as if entranced. Ruth was using a chiffon scarf, which at one moment floated over her head like hovering smoke, and the next streamed from her shoulders like wings.

“ Topping ! Absolutely topping ! ”

The dance had ended, and Ruth had come to rest with a graceful curtsy at Ivy's feet.

“ Where did you learn to dance like that ? ” asked Beryl.

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"At home," replied Ruth, panting, "when I was quite a kid. Mother was a dancer—professional, I mean. Muriel Wraith was her stage name. She taught me quite a lot when I was at home, but I've rather let it drop since I came to school."

"D'you mean to say you can dance like that without practising for years?"

"Oh, I practised a bit at home last winter, in the hols.," said Ruth. "It soon comes back to one. Come along, you two; we'll try it together."

"Let's concentrate on that first movement, then when you've got that more or less right we can go on to the next, and so on."

Her pupils readily agreed, and the first movement was taken over and over again until they were able to do it more or less to Ruth's satisfaction. Then they proceeded to the next.

It was while they were still rehearsing the second movement that Ivy, casting round for something which might suggest a plot for her play, happened to look up at the school buildings. She was just thinking what a dreary place the back of St. Meredith's looked at night when something white, pressed against

the window of the science classroom, caught her eye. A face? She looked again, but it had disappeared. It might have been her imagination, but somehow there sprang vividly to her mind the recollection of that dream which had haunted her on the first night of term—that vision of Mademoiselle Frogart's florid face pursuing her up stairs and down corridors with relentless persistence.

She watched the window for the reappearance of the white patch, but nothing happened. At length, not wishing to alarm the others, she decided to dismiss it from her mind and let them continue the rehearsal.

Step by step Rita and Barbara were taken right through the dance, until at length Ruth declared herself satisfied with their progress, and suggested that they should take a rest.

"I'd love to watch Tonky's face if she could see us out here at this time of night!" said Marion, in a loud whisper.

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when the whole courtyard was lit up with a yellow brilliance. The kitchen lights had been switched on, and through the window the girls could see the figure of Miss Tonks herself, clad in a dressing-gown, crossing the

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room. Close behind came the French mistress, fully dressed.

So it had been a face, after all ! The girls stood still, alarmed and bewildered. It was useless to hide, as they had been seen already ; there was nothing for it but to stand their ground.

" What are you shaking for, silly ? " whispered Marion to Barbara, who had caught hold of her arm. " She can't eat you ! "

The door was flung open and Nemesis, in the shape of Miss Tonks, stood in the doorway.

" Girls ! What is the meaning of this ? Come in at once ! "

There was something stern and peremptory about the command which compelled prompt obedience. Led by Marion, the seven trooped into the kitchen, looking very sheepish, and lined up in front of the range.

" Ivy, will you please explain ? " demanded Miss Tonks, in icy tones.

There was something in her glance which seemed to register sorrow and disappointment, as though she had expected better things of Ivy, of all girls.

" Well, you see," began Ivy, colouring to

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the roots of her hair, "we thought perhaps—that is, we'd decided to have an entertainment——"

"Indeed! At eleven o'clock at night?"

"Oh, no, we were just practising."

"We thought we'd like to give a surprise entertainment, just to our own friends," explained Marion, "and we were going to ask permission to give it in the small lecture hall; only we wanted to keep the rehearsals secret. Ruth's been teaching us some dances."

"*Ruth* has?" There was a note of incredulity in Miss Tonks' voice. Ruth's reputation was known to mistresses and girls alike.

"She can dance beautifully," declared Beryl, with enthusiasm; "you ought to see her."

"I hope I may some day," said the Head-mistress, finding it difficult to be severe. "But not at eleven o'clock at night. Evidently you don't realise the serious nature of your misconduct. I shall have to discuss this further with you to-morrow. You will all meet me in my study immediately after prayers. Go to your rooms at once."

Somewhat cowed, the girls filed out of the

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kitchen without a word, except that Marion, who appeared to be the least perturbed of any, paused at the door and turned towards the Headmistress with a disarming smile.

"Good-night, Miss Tonks! *Bon nuit, ma'm'selle!*" she said.

"Good-night, Marion," replied Miss Tonks. But the French mistress did not speak.

* * * * *

Immediately after prayers the following morning the seven delinquents proceeded to Miss Tonks' study and there awaited the arrival of the Headmistress. With the exception of Marion, who was quite cool and collected, they were all more or less in a state of nervousness. They discussed in anxious whispers the probable outcome of the interview, and listened apprehensively to every sound of footsteps in the corridor.

"It isn't as though it was only last night," observed Beryl. "Froggy's sure to have split about finding us in the north tower that morning. That'll make things ten times hotter for us, because it isn't a first offence."

"If she has," said Marion, defiantly, "I'll

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tell Tonky exactly what I think of Froggy, the sneaking——”

Her speech was cut short by the brisk entry of Miss Tonks herself, whose pre-occupied expression changed for a moment to one of mild surprise at the presence of the girls.

“Oh, yes, of course,” she murmured, and crossing the room, sat down at her desk. For fully half-a-minute she remained silent, staring at the papers in front of her, and tapping them with her *pince-nez*, as was her habit when deep in thought. At last she looked up and glanced along the line of girls in front of her.

“I must confess,” she began, “that I was surprised, and not a little disappointed”—this with a glance at Ivy—“at last night’s incident. I should like to know who is responsible.”

“It was my suggestion,” said Beryl, fidgeting nervously.

“We were all responsible,” said Marion. “There wasn’t room in the dormitory to practise the dances, so we went outside.”

“Outside or inside, you had no business to be out of bed at that hour,” said the Head-mistress.

“We’re awfully sorry——” began Ivy.

"I don't want you to be sorry," said Miss Tonks, not unkindly. "All I want is to be assured that it won't happen again."

"Oh, it won't—really it won't," declared Ivy, anxious to re-establish herself in the good esteem of her beloved Headmistress.

"Very well," said Miss Tonks, "we'll leave it at that. As it's a first offence, I don't propose to say any more about it. Now, about this entertainment that you are preparing to give to some of your friends. What sort of an entertainment is it to be?"

"A kind of concert," replied Ivy, "with songs and recitations and dances."

"And Ivy was going to try to write a play," put in Marion.

"I'm afraid I can't allow a concert of that kind to be given for the benefit of just a few girls," said Miss Tonks. "The whole school ought to be invited."

"We were afraid it mightn't be good enough," said Beryl.

Miss Tonks smiled encouragingly. "I'm sure it will," she said. "You may have the big hall for the occasion, and for the rehearsals you may have the use of the small lecture hall between preparation and supper. You

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can lock the door and be as private as you like. So far as I am concerned no one need know about it until the day of the concert."

Robbed of its element of adventure, the enterprise lost much of its attractiveness. The girls felt, however, that they could not be so ungracious as to refuse Miss Tonks' offer, and thanked her accordingly.

"You had better be getting back to your classes now," said the Headmistress, genially. "I'm afraid you've missed a good part of the first hour already."

The girls turned and filed out of the study.

"Jolly decent of her," remarked Beryl, as they went along the corridor. "She might have made it hot for us."

"She's a sport," declared Marion, with which sentiment the others agreed.

"Froggy's evidently not told her about the tower," said Ivy. "I wonder why not."

"She's got some good reason of her own, you bet," observed Marion, "and it's not any love for you!"

CHAPTER VI.

GHOST STORIES.

A roar of incredulous laughter greeted the end of a highly improbable ghost story with which Mavis Hunter had been entertaining the girls in the common-room one evening after supper.

"You can't expect us to believe that," said Marion; "it's too rich."

"It's true," protested Mavis.

"How d'you know?"

"I got it from our cook at home. It actually happened to her cousin's young man," explained Mavis.

"That doesn't prove it's true," said Marion.

"Well, she's a good cook, anyway."

"Must be," chimed in Beryl, "to be able to dish up a yarn like that."

"Does anyone else know any ghost

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stories?" asked Ivy, quite prepared to be entertained, although she had not the slightest belief in such things.

"Oh, no!" cried Ruth, "no more, please. I shall be afraid to go up to bed. I'm alone to-night, don't forget!"

"Where's Mandy?"

"Gone home for the week-end—sister's wedding or something of the kind. I'm sure I shall be scared to death in that room by myself; I feel all creepy already."

The others laughed.

"Come down to No. 19 if you feel nervy," said Beryl. "We'll make you up a bed on the floor."

"Does anyone know any *true* ghost stories?" inquired Ivy.

"Mavis has just told us one," laughed Beryl. "She knows it's true because her cook—a *good* cook, mind you—heard it from her young man's cousin."

"Cousin's young man," corrected Mavis.

"Oh, well, it comes to the same thing so far as the story's concerned," said Beryl. "Perhaps Mavis knows another?"

But Mavis didn't; at least, not one she could actually guarantee. It was true that

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a charlady they had once employed had told her, on one occasion——

“Look here,” said Ivy, interrupting what promised to be another of Mavis’ tall tales. “I propose we don’t have any stories that can’t be vouched for by somebody present.”

“Hear ! hear !” came half-a dozen voices.

“Now then, Mavis, did you actually see your charlady’s ghost ?”

“It wasn’t her ghost,” said Mavis, evading the issue.

“Well, never mind whose ghost it was. Were you actually there ?”

“I was when she told me,” persisted Mavis ; but her story, by common consent, was ruled out of the category of true yarns.

There was a short silence ; nobody seemed to have any personal experiences to relate, but half the girls in the room jumped nervously when the handle of the door was turned a moment later.

It was only Rita, however, who had been reading in the library, and so had missed the eerie conversation of the common room.

Rita’s entry served to break the spell, and the girls laughed heartily at their own nervousness.

"All the same," said Ruth, "I wish I hadn't got to sleep by myself to-night."

"What? Are you nervous?" asked Rita, in genuine surprise. "I'll tell you what—I'll come and keep you company. Wait till 'lights out' has gone and things are quiet, then I'll slip along and tuck into Mandy's bed for to-night."

Ruth was truly thankful for the promise of company, and raised no objection when Ivy and some of the others invited Rita to contribute a ghost story of her own to the evening's entertainment.

"I don't know any ghost stories," said Rita, "and, what's more, I don't believe in ghosts."

"It needn't be actually a ghost story," said Marion. "Anything uncanny'll do, so long as it's true." "

Rita thought for a moment.

"It must be true?" she queried.

"Yes," said Ivy; "Mavis can supply all we want of the other sort."

Mavis began to protest, but was speedily quelled.

"There was something that happened once at St. Monica's," said Rita, hesitatingly. "It

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made us all feel rather creepy at the time, but of course, there was nothing in it, really."

A chorus of voices demanded to be told the tale, so Rita began.

"At St. Monica's," she said, "there was a girl named Cynthia Halliday. She was rather a brainy girl, but really quite popular, considering. At least, she wasn't so much brainy by nature, but she worked frightfully hard because she wanted some special scholarship that she'd only about one chance in a million of getting.

"Anyway, she was in our dormitory. It was a long room with twenty beds—ten on each side, and Cynthia used to say it reminded her of a hospital—which was rather funny, considering what happened.

"Cynthia's bed was next to mine, and she used to disturb me in the night quite a lot, turning over first one side, and then the other, because she couldn't sleep very well, and, for that matter, nor could I, thanks to her.

"Well, one day she became frightfully ill—high temperature, and all that—and they moved her to the isolation hospital, thinking she'd got something catching, and we all had

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a regular set-out, gargling our throats and having our temperatures taken after she'd gone.

"The hospital was a separate building, really, but it was joined to our block by a sort of bridge at the end of our corridor; only, of course, no one was allowed to go through except the staff.

"Well, it turned out it wasn't anything infectious, but brain-fever pure and simple. The doctor gave it a name a yard long, but I can't remember what it was, and although it wasn't catching they kept her in the hospital for the sake of quiet, and we all had to be most frightfully particular not to make a noise in the corridor or out in the quad.

"She was away a long time, and didn't get any better, and when it was clear she wouldn't come back to the dormitory that term they put another girl, Peggy Jackson, in her bed. Peggy was a small girl, who slept like a top, so I wasn't disturbed any more at nights.

"Well, one day we heard that Cynthia was worse, and that the chances were she'd die, and all that day we went about talking in hushed whispers, and couldn't do any work for thinking of Cynthia. The doctor was

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there most of the morning, and all the afternoon, and it was said he was expecting a crisis which would decide whether Cynthia was going to die or live.

“ When we went to bed that night we asked matron how things were, and she said Cynthia was still lingering between life and death, and that the doctor'd given her something to make her sleep, but like as not she wouldn't live till morning.

“ Of course, that made us feel more gloomy than ever, and after the lights were out—they turned them off from the matron's room, there—we lit candles and sat up in bed and talked about Cynthia, and people dying, and things like that.

“ Some of the girls wondered if we should know when Cynthia died ; whether some sort of instinct would tell us that it had happened, and Julia Vernon, who was full of creepy notions about ghosts and spectres and things like that, declared that it was a positive fact that the moment anyone died his ‘ spectral body,’ as she put it, appeared to the person who was thinking specially hard about him.

“ That made several of the girls get under the bedclothes, and Julia lit another candle

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because she said the room seemed so creepy with only three burning. Just as she did that the handle of the dormitory door turned ever so gently, and very, very slowly it began to open. At first we could see nothing but a strip of blackness, which was the dark passage outside.

“ ‘ It’s the draught,’ said Julia, in a hollow voice. ‘ Ida, get out and shut the door ; you’re nearest.’ ”

“ But Ida, instead of getting out, got under the sheet as the door opened wider and a thin, ghostly figure came silently into the room. It was all in white, and its face was deathly pale, and though its eyes were open they didn’t seem to see, for it held its hands out in front as it walked, as though groping in the darkness.

“ Of course, we were all shaking from head to foot, for we saw at once the likeness to Cynthia, and knew what had happened. Peggy, in the bed next to me, ducked right down under the clothes, but most of us were sitting up in bed absolutely paralysed with fright.

“ The ghost moved slowly down the middle of the room without turning its head right or left, until it came to the end of Peggy’s bed.

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Then, with a sort of gliding motion, it moved sideways along the bed, passing its hands up and down the counterpane as if feeling for something.

"You could see Peggy trembling right through the blankets, and all of us were wondering what was going to happen next, when suddenly the ghost caught hold of the bedclothes and flung them back.

"Poor Peggy gave a blood-curdling shriek and tumbled out of bed—I never saw her get out so quickly before or since—and absolutely dived head-first under my quilt. The next minute the 'ghost' got into Peggy's bed—you remember it was Cynthia's before Peggy had it—pulled up the bedclothes, and calmly lay down and went to sleep!

"It was quite five minutes before any of us dared to move. Then four of us plucked up courage and went and fetched matron. You should have seen her face when we told her! It turned out, of course, that the ghost wasn't a ghost at all, but Cynthia herself, who had got out of bed in her sleep, and walked back to her old dormitory."

"Did she die?" asked Beryl.

"No," said Rita. "That was the turning-

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point. They left her where she was, and she slept solidly for two days. After that she began to get better quickly, and in a fortnight she was quite well again."

At this point the retiring bell rang, and the girls began to disperse. Ruth, whose show of nervousness was not forgotten, was well escorted to the door of No. 27, and a "search-party," consisting of Marion, Mavis and Barbara, insisted on making a thorough examination of the dormitory—in the wardrobe, under the bed, even in the chest of drawers—in order to assure themselves of the complete absence of spook inhabitants. This done, they wrote out a certificate and handed it to Ruth, to the effect that the room had been examined and found free from ghosts.

The appearance at the far end of the corridor of the matron, going her rounds for the night, caused them to disperse quickly to their respective dormitories. Soon all was quiet, and in No. 19 the "lights out" signal found all the occupants snugly in bed, with the exception of Rita, who was sitting on the edge of Ivy's bed, clad in a dressing-gown, waiting for a safe moment to arrive in which to slip up to Ruth's room as she had promised.

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She gave the matron ten minutes in which to finish her tour of inspection, and then slipped quickly out into the dark corridor.

"I shouldn't like to go up there in the dark," whispered Barbara, as the door closed behind Rita.

"Why not?" said Ivy. "Don't be so silly!"

There was a short silence, and then, quite distinctly, the quick pattering of bare feet was heard in the corridor. The next instant the door of the dormitory was burst open, and a gasping, trembling figure flung itself across the foot of Barbara's bed.

Ivy sat up with a start.

"Whoever's that?" she cried.

"It's me—Rita. Shut the door, quick," came a hoarse whisper from the darkness.

"Why, whatever's the matter?" demanded Ivy, getting out of bed to comply. "Here, light a candle, somebody! Rita, what's wrong?"

"I've seen something—a ghost!" said Rita. "Oh, it was horrible!"

Mariòn laughed. "She's only pulling our legs," she declared. "Here, Rita, we're not such chumps as you take us for."

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But Beryl had struck a light, and was bending over Rita.

"Quick, Ivy, get some water," she cried; "she's nearly fainting."

Rita, trembling from head to foot, sipped the water Ivy brought her.

"I shall be all right in a minute," she cried; "but it gave me such a turn."

The others stood round her with puzzled expressions on their faces.

"Honest Injun," demanded Marion; "aren't you pulling our legs, Rita?"

"Don't worry her," said Ivy. "Can't you see she's had a shock?"

For a few minutes nobody spoke, but Rita kept breaking out into fresh fits of trembling. At last, however, she calmed down and, aided by Beryl's supporting arm, crossed to her own bed.

"We don't know yet what happened," said Marion, still vaguely suspicious.

"I'm not swanking, really," protested Rita, "and it wasn't imagination, either."

"Where did you see it?" asked Barbara.

"Along the main corridor."

"What were you doing along the main corridor? The back way's much nearer."

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" I know. I started to go that way, but it seemed so dark and creepy with all those twists and turns, so I changed my mind and decided to go along to the main staircase. There was just a dim light coming in through the west window, but otherwise it was quite dark. I was just turning to go up the stairs when I thought I heard a door click. I stopped and listened. At first I couldn't hear anything, then there came a soft, shuffling sound, though where it was coming from I couldn't see. I felt I wanted to run, but I didn't know which way to go for fear of barging into whoever it was. So I stepped back into a doorway and waited. All at once my heart came into my mouth. I saw something moving in the corridor beyond the staircase. It was white, and coming towards me. The next moment it came out of the pitch-dark corridor, and in the light from the window I could see it as clearly as I can see you now."

" What was it like ? " asked Barbara.

Rita gave a little shudder.

" It had a chalky-white face, with great round holes for its eyes and mouth, and hair hanging round, all limp, and it had a long white robe which came right down to the

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ground. It didn't walk exactly, it just glided along, and made straight for where I was standing. I nearly fainted. Then, just when it was so close I could have touched it, it turned and floated down the stairs."

"Floated?"

"Well, I don't know how else to describe it. It moved so smoothly and didn't seem to touch the ground. Oh, it was ghastly. I felt myself shaking all over, and thought my heart would have stopped beating."

"It's somebody playing a prank on you," declared Ivy. "They tried it on me last term, but it didn't work."

"It's too bad," said Beryl. "I shouldn't wonder if it's Ethel Vaughan—she heard you say you didn't believe in ghosts."

"We'll pay her out, if it is," said Marion.

"I don't see how it could be," said Rita. "She didn't know I'd be along there to-night."

"She knew you were going up to Ruth's room, and you had to go one way or the other," persisted Beryl.

Rita was too shaken to argue, and as Beryl's theory appeared quite a reasonable one, the blame for the escapade was laid, rightly or wrongly, upon Ethel.

CHAPTER VII.

COOK GIVES NOTICE.

The Headmistress, seated at her study desk, had finished dealing with the morning's correspondence, and was just turning her attention to certain necessary alterations in the school curriculum when a knock came at the door.

"Come in," she said, without looking up.

The door opened to admit the cook, who closed the door behind her and stood patiently waiting for an opportunity to speak. She was clearly agitated, and kept twisting the corner of her apron by way of keeping her hands occupied.

At last Miss Tonks glanced inquiringly up from her papers. A look of mild surprise crossed her face as she caught sight of the cook's bulky form, and she felt instinctively that something must be wrong.

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"Yes, Jane?" she asked, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"If you please, miss," began the cook, "I want to give notice, and I—I want to go at once."

"You want to give notice, Jane!" said the Headmistress. "I'm sorry to hear that. I thought you were quite happy here?"

"So I was, miss, until yesterday. But I can't stay here no longer, miss. I know I ought to give proper notice, but I'd sooner lose a month's pay than stop 'ere another day."

"But, Jane, I don't understand! Whatever can have happened? Has Emily been troublesome again?"

"No, miss; Emily's all right—leastways, as right as she'll ever be, the little hussy! No, it ain't Emily. The fact is, miss, this place is 'aunted; that's the long and the short of it."

"Haunted?"

"Yes, miss! An' them ghosts is a thing I can't abide. I'd sooner far the place was swarmin' with beetles!"

"Ghosts! Jane, do be sensible! There aren't such things; they're merely a figment of a morbid imagination!"

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" Well, I know there *is* such things, miss, 'cause I've seen one, and my eyesight's as good as anybody's."

" You've seen one, Jane? Where? "

" In the courtyard, miss, last night. I seen it as plain as I see you now, miss, about eleven o'clock, it must ha' been. I was just gettin' into bed when I thinks to myself : ' Lumme ! ' I thinks, ' I've been and left that there pantry door open. There's no knowin' what them cats'll be up to in the night. So I slips on a coat and some shoes an' comes down just as I was, never thinkin' as I might see anything spiritual-like. Well, I 'ardly gets inside the kitchen when I catches sight of somethin' movin' outside the window. I was that 'orror-struck I never thought to turn on the light. I jest stood where, I was, like as if I'd been froze stiff.' It was a ghost, miss, sure as I'm alive, an' it walked up and down that there yard with its 'ands 'eld out—so ! "

" Nonsense, Jane. You must have been dreaming. I don't suppose you came downstairs at all. Something's upset your digestion, and it was a sort of nightmare you were having. I'll get Dr. Fitzgerald to see you when he comes to-day."

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"It weren't no dream, miss, though it was a nightmare, right enough. An' as for me not comin' downstairs, all I know is I came *upstairs* that fast I couldn't get my breath for ten minutes afterwards; and Emily—imperant little hussy—she said it 'ud do me good for to 'ave a fright like that twice a day, mornin' and evenin', if only for the sake of exercise!"

Miss Tonks suppressed a smile as she surveyed Jane's fat, indignant form.

"Have any of the others complained of seeing apparitions?" she inquired.

"No, miss, only Maud, and there's no relying on what she says. She come to me last Friday with some tale o' what she'd seen out o' the window at a time o' night when she'd no business to be out o' bed. She said it made 'orrid' noises, but I never 'eard none. Anyway, I told 'er she'd better shut up or she'd get the sack if she went spreadin' them tales about. Only now I've seen it myself I'm beginning to think that maybe she was speakin' the truth for once!"

"I'm afraid, Jane, I can't allow you to leave without due notice," said the Headmistress. "But if you see anything uncanny again

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don't wait until the next morning, but come and call me at once."

Reluctantly Jane submitted to authority and returned to the kitchen, resolved, at any rate, to depart for good at the end of the term.

* * * * *

"How are you getting on with the play, Ivy?" asked Marion.

Beryl and Ivy were resting on a seat beside the tennis courts, while Marion and Ruth were engaged in the deadly combat of a "single." Rita was squatting on the ground at their feet.

"Oh, slowly," said Ivy, reluctant to give anything away till the task was finished.

"Got any ideas? What sort of a play is it going to be?"

"I don't know what sort of a play you'd call it," confessed Ivy.

"Is it comedy, tragedy, or history?" inquired Rita, thinking of her Shakespeare.

Ivy thought for a moment.

"I don't think you could call it any of those," she replied, "unless, perhaps, it's a history."

"What's it called?" asked Beryl.

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"I haven't decided yet," said Ivy; "but I rather think of calling it 'The Secret of the Well.' I got the idea that first night we started rehearsing the dances—out in the courtyard. There's a well there, did you notice?"

"Yes," said Beryl; "I saw it—all overgrown with moss and things."

"I didn't," said Rita. "Where was it?"

"Right opposite the kitchen door, close to the broken-down wall," said Ivy. "Somehow or other it suggested an idea to me, but I don't know how it'll work out."

"Our rehearsals indoors are frightfully tame compared with that one," observed Rita. "It's not nearly as much fun doing what you may do as doing what you mustn't."

At this moment Barbara appeared on the courts, her face flushed with excitement.

"I say," she exclaimed, coming up to the others, "I met Emily on the stairs just now, and she says cook's given notice."

"Oh!" said Beryl. "Whatever for?"

"That's just the exciting part," declared Barbara. "It's because she says the school's haunted. I thought I must come and tell

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you right away, after what happened to Rita. Funny, isn't it ? ”

“ Jolly mysterious,” agreed Beryl.

“ Did Emily tell you anything else—any details, I mean ? ”

“ Only that cook swears she saw a ghost last night, walking up and down the courtyard in the moonlight,” said Barbara. “ From her description, it must have been the same one that you saw last week.”

“ Did you say anything to Emily about what happened to Rita ? ” asked Ivy.

“ No,” said Barbara ; “ I thought I'd better not.”

“ Quite right. Don't tell a soul. This is a matter for No. 19 and nobody else.”

Marion had just finished a losing set, and Mavis, who was waiting to make up a four, claimed the victorious Ruth as partner. Defeated, but cheerful, Marion rejoined the group on the seat, and was at once summoned into conference on the subject of apparitions and haunted courtyards. It was some minutes before she could bring herself to enter seriously into the discussion, so foreign did the topic seem to the vigorous and healthy nature of the game she had just been playing.

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"I haven't patience with people who talk about such things," she said, forgetting for the moment that Rita was there. "At least," she added, "not with people who seriously believe in them."

"I don't know," said Barbara. "When you've got such evidence——"

"Evidence? Rats!" retorted Marion. "Rita thought she saw a ghost because we'd just been talking about them; and as for cook, well, anything'd scare her. Emily says she screams if she sees a mouse!"

"Anyway, I should like to get to the bottom of it," said Ivy. "I think we ought to investigate, don't you?"

"Couldn't we set a trap?" suggested Beryl.

"I read somewhere," observed Marion, sarcastically, "that ghosts are very fond of cheese."

Barbara looked at Marion seriously.

"I don't think Beryl meant *that* sort of trap," she said.

The others could not refrain from laughing.

"Don't be an ass, Barbara," said Ivy. "Marion knows quite well what Beryl means. How about a ghost-hunt to-night, down in the courtyard? Who'll come?"

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Beryl jumped at the idea ; but the others did not seem keen.

"When you've been as close to it as I have, you won't want to go out looking for it in a hurry," declared Rita.

Barbara said she'd rather not.

"What about you, Marion? You're not nervous, are you?"

"Me? Heavens alive! I'd go alone if I thought there was anything to see," said Marion, and rather than let herself be thought anything other than the bold, adventurous soul she knew herself to be, she allowed them to include her in the band of heroes who were to brave the danger of the haunted yard that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A-HUNTING WE WILL GO."

"What's that?"

A long and patient vigil by Ivy and her companions had so far been unrewarded. Armed with a flash-lamp, they had waited hopefully for the ghost to put in an appearance but had been disappointed.

Apart from the fact that everything looked somewhat unnatural in the pale light of the waning moon, there was really nothing particularly uncanny about the old courtyard. Now and again an owl somewhere up in the tall trees just beyond the wall did his best to add to the effect by hooting dismally, but there was no disguising the fact that the ghost-hunt, as such, had not been a success.

A faint rustling among the bushes caused the three watchers to look round expectantly.

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For some moments it continued, then suddenly ceased.

"It's nothing," whispered Ivy. "Just a grass snake or lizard."

The three girls were crouching close to the battered wall at a spot where a thick-foliaged little tree threw its shadow across the yard.

All at once a long-drawn wail, as of a soul in torment, rent the night air, and the next instant a soft something descended with a thud on Marion's right shoulder. Marion, letting out a yell that astonished and alarmed her companions, gripped Ivy's arm so tightly that it was all Ivy could do to stifle an exclamation of pain.

"Oh, what was that? What was that?" cried Marion, shaking like a leaf.

"Shut up, you idiot!" whispered Ivy. "All the school will hear you."

"There it is!" exclaimed Beryl, pointing to where the shadow was deepest. Ivy and Marion strained their eyes in the direction indicated. Out of the darkness, slowly moving towards them, came two round green orbs of phosphorescent light.

"Why, it's only Tibby! Here, Tibby,

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Tibby! What a fright you gave us! Now come and apologise."

The cat, unaccustomed to find humans about at that time of night, rubbed its whiskers against their legs in the friendliest manner possible.

"You ought to be in bed long ago, Tibby," whispered Beryl. "I don't know what Miss Tonks would say if she found you out here at this time of night."

Tibby began to purr loudly, making a noise not unlike a lawn-mower.

"Run along, Tibby," said Marion. "Go and find your pals. It's time we went in."

She was about to move towards the kitchen when Ivy dragged her back.

"Look!" she said, "I told you you'd wake the whole school!"

Following her gaze, the others saw, through the kitchen window, the most grotesque of spectacles. Headed by Jane, the cook, in nightgown and curlpapers, came a procession consisting of Emily, the scullerymaid, and two of the housemaids, Maud and Ellen. Each was carrying a lighted candle in one hand and a weapon of some kind in the other. Jane, the cook, had a poker, Emily a carpet-

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beater, and Maud and Ellen a hockey-stick each. Cautiously the "torchlight procession," as Ivy called it, wound its way through the kitchen and towards the outer door.

"They mean business, by the look of it!" said Ivy. "Here, over the wall, quick!"

The others did not need any encouragement. They had clambered over the wall and dropped down into the soft mould on the other side almost before Ivy had spoken. At the same moment the door opened, and Jane and her followers emerged into the courtyard.

Although the night was calm, there was enough movement in the air to make the candles flicker ominously, and the torch-bearers had some difficulty in preventing them from going out.

Ivy, peering cautiously over the wall, watched the movements of the grotesque little company as they tip-toed up and down the yard, always keeping close together and glancing nervously about them as if in mortal fear of meeting the very thing they had come to look for.

Suddenly Ivy looked down, with a whispered warning to the others. Whether Jane and her companions had caught sight of her head

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over the parapet she did not know, but it was certain that they were all making straight across in her direction. The position was critical. To escape across the kitchen-garden was impossible ; it was far too exposed, and, on the other hand, to force their way through the bushes would cause such a noise as to make discovery certain.

All at once Tibby came to their aid. Just as Jane and her warriors approached the wall there arose from the darkness another of those hideous, long-drawn-out wails that are the proud accomplishment of suburban cats at night-time.

Ivy guessed aright the effect which this unearthly and unexpected sound would have on the nervous Jane, and with quick resourcefulness decided to add her own contribution to the cook's discomfiture. Standing boldly on some of the fallen brickwork so that her head and shoulders appeared above the wall she held the flashlamp on a level with her chest, and for a moment shone its brilliant light on to her own face.

The effect upon Jane and her companions was electric. That plaintive wail from the shadows, combined with the sudden appear-

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ance of the illuminated face, was more than their nerves could stand. With complete lack of dignity the cook turned and bolted for the kitchen—only to be passed *en route* by her less corpulent followers. There was quite a struggle to get indoors first, and for a moment the cook and Emily were jammed in the doorway together.

The three girls, who had watched the proceedings with intense amusement, could hardly suppress their laughter as the door closed behind the runaway warriors, until the turning of the key in the kitchen door conveyed to them the awkward fact that their own line of retreat was cut off. Jane had locked them out!

"What's to happen now?" demanded Marion. "We can't stay here all night!"

"P'raps the others will come and look for us, if we wait long enough," suggested Beryl.

"Not they! They'll be in bed and asleep by this time!"

"There's the fire escape," observed Ivy. "But it's no good if the window's fastened."

"Let's try, anyway," said Beryl. "It's just a chance."

Careful not to make a noise, the three scaled

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the wall again and crossed the courtyard to the corner of the south wing, from which point a gravel path ran round to the front of the school buildings. Most of the dormitory windows overlooked this path, and they had to walk most warily ; but at length they came to the spot at which a narrow iron ladder ran down from an upper window, at a distance of some six or eight inches from the wall, and ended in the soft soil of a bed of asters.

" I'll go first," whispered Ivy, " and if the window's open and the coast's clear, I'll signal down with two flashes."

Stepping as lightly as she could, she crossed the bed and climbed the ladder. A few seconds later the two girls below heard the sound of a sash-window being opened ever so gently, and the next moment a couple of bright flashes from above indicated that all was clear. Gripping the cold iron rungs, Beryl and Marion followed Ivy up the ladder and dropped noiselessly over the sill into the upper corridor.

Marion closed the window quietly, and then removed her shoes. Without a word the others copied her example, and together they hurried silently along the corridor towards

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the back staircase. This staircase was little used, except by the domestic staff. It had several sharp turns, and there was a small landing or recess half-way up, which served as a sort of housemaid's pantry.

Remembering that one or two of the steps were inclined to creak, the girls descended them cautiously. They had almost reached the lower corridor when, at a warning signal from Ivy, who was leading, they stopped and listened. Quite distinctly they could hear a quick, soft footfall. It was impossible to tell whether the footsteps were going or coming, and for a moment the girls hesitated, uncertain what to do.

Suddenly Ivy turned, without a word, and dashing past the others led the way to the half-landing. Beryl and Marion followed close upon her heels. They were only just in time, for almost before they had reached the shelter of the recess, with its jumble of brooms, dusters and housemaids' overalls, a shadowy figure turned the corner and commenced to mount the stairs.

Whoever the prowler was, she was clearly unfamiliar with that part of the building, for now and again she flashed an electric torch on

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to the stairs as if to see the way. Luckily, she did not appear to notice the recess in which the girls were crouching, but, passing the half-way landing, turned the corner and disappeared. As she did so, her lamp flashed for a second on to the wall at the bend of the stairs, and against the round patch of light there appeared for a moment a silhouetted figure.

"Did you see who it was?" whispered Beryl, when the footsteps had died away.

"No," said Ivy. "Who was it?"

"Well, I wouldn't be absolutely positive," answered Beryl, "but I think it was Froggy!"

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CHAPTER IX.

ST. MEREDITH'S v. EASTMOUTH COLLEGE.

Preparations for the concert were now well advanced. Ruth was delighted with the progress made by her dancing pupils, and felt confident of being able to carry through that part of the programme to the satisfaction of the audience. The songs and recitations had been worked up to a state approaching perfection, and the only thing as to the success of which any anxiety remained was Ivy's play.

Nervously, almost apologetically, she had read it through to the others, and it had been received in practically dead silence. Rita and Barbara had murmured something about its "doing very nicely," but this was more from politeness than conviction, and Marion, who never minced matters, was quite outspoken in her disapproval.

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"Couldn't you do something better than that?" she inquired. "It doesn't sound very thrilling."

"There's hardly enough action, do you think?" suggested Ruth, reluctant to say anything to mar a newly-formed friendship.

"I think something funny would go down better," volunteered Mandy. "A sort of comedy, you know, like *Brewster's Millions*."

Poor Ivy turned over the pages ruefully.

"It's harder than you think to write anything original," she said. "I've done the best I could. Still, if it's not good enough, we'll miss it out altogether, and put in a few more songs."

"We won't do anything of the kind," said Beryl, hotly, taking up the cudgels on her chum's behalf. "I think it's topping, and ought to go down splendidly; and if you others think you can write a better one, just you go and do it!"

"Oh, I couldn't write a play to save my life!" declared Marion.

"Nor could I!" echoed Ruth.

"Well, then, don't discourage poor old Ivy when she's done her best!"

So after that it was decided to go ahead

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with Ivy's play, and to commence the rehearsals at once.

The question as to who was to play the various parts had been settled by Ivy in advance, and there was a part for everybody—except Mandy and herself.

"You can't leave yourself out," protested Beryl. "It's your play, and you ought to have the chief part in it."

"Look here, you take my part," offered Marion. "I don't mind standing out, and you could play it ten times better than I could."

But Ivy declined.

"I've got to be producer and prompter and all that sort of thing," she explained. "And I couldn't do it properly if I had to play a part myself. And I want Mandy to act as a stage-manager, and to help with the curtains and scenery. You don't mind, Mandy, do you?"

Mandy said she didn't, and as Ivy was obviously determined, the others let her have her way.

As the rehearsals proceeded it became possible to introduce various little improvements into the plot and dialogue, and all dissatisfaction with the play was soon forgotten in the serious business of production.

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Ivy and Mandy spent much time designing the costumes and planning how to beg, borrow, or steal the requisite stage properties. It was decided, in so far as the necessary garments could not be borrowed or otherwise honestly come by, to construct them out of crêpe paper, the usefulness of which for such purposes had been discovered by Mandy on a previous occasion.

"You can make hats, frocks, jumpers—anything you like with it, and quite good enough to last for one evening," she said, "and it's ever so cheap."

That was, indeed, a prime consideration, for an expenditure of more than a few shillings at the outside would have meant writing home for funds, and that they were loath to do. There was also quite a number of oddments to obtain, of which Mandy prepared a full and detailed list. How to purchase these was, however, a problem. There were, of course, no shops on Fairby Island, which contained nothing but the school and the groundsman's cottage, and leave to visit the mainland was only granted on very special occasions or in case of emergency. Even if they were to get leave to cross to Little

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Shelby it was unlikely that the shops would have just what they wanted in stock.

Their opportunity came, however, on the occasion of the Eastmouth College Hockey match, the most important outdoor event of the school term. Isolated as St. Meredith's was, few opportunities occurred for the school to test its prowess in the hockey-field, although well-organised matches were played throughout the term between the various houses into which the school was divided for sports purposes. Nevertheless, St. Meredith's could turn out quite a strong team, and vague hopes were being entertained by the truly optimistic that they might, this term, pull off a victory in the Eastmouth College match—a thing which they had never yet succeeded in doing. Some grounds for this hope were afforded by the scores in recent matches, which had been steadily moving in favour of St. Meredith's, until, on the last occasion, the game resulted in a draw, with one goal to the credit of each side.

If St. Meredith's was hopeful of tilting the scales at last in the other direction, Eastmouth College was equally alive to their danger of defeat, with the result that both sides had been practising unusually hard for weeks with

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the determination bred of hope and fear respectively.

Miss Rawlins, in charge of sports at St. Meredith's, had been at great pains to select her team, going so far as to try-out some of the younger girls in the practice matches, in disregard of precedent and even of the special claims of former members of the eleven, and it was in consequence of this that Ivy found herself in the final twenty from whom the team was to be selected.

Ivy's special claim to inclusion in the team was that she was almost equally good in any part of the field, and could be relied on to play a vigorous and telling game. She was not, however, particularly fast, and for this reason it was decided in the end not to include her in the team.

"We'll take you as reserve, Ivy," said Miss Rawlins. "One never knows what may happen at the last moment."

Ivy, though naturally somewhat disappointed, was quite cheerful about it. At least, it meant that she was in the running for the first eleven, and she felt that her chance was sure to come at no distant date—that was, of course, if the school managed to carry on.

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The thought recalled to her mind the tragedy of the missing title-deeds, and she wondered whether even at that moment the legal owner of Fairby Island might not be striking a bargain with some Italian count or American millionaire, which would bring the school's career to an untimely close.

But there was another reason why Ivy was glad to be accompanying the team to Eastmouth. It would give her the opportunity for which she had been waiting to visit the shops and make the necessary purchases for the surprise concert, now close at hand.

"If I come as reserve, may Beryl and Mandy come with me?" she inquired. "They've got some very special shopping to do."

Miss Rawlins looked interested.

"What is it you want to buy?" she inquired.

"Well," said Ivy, "that's a secret. Nobody knows about it except Miss Tonks and ourselves."

"Oh, if Miss Tonks knows about it, it's all right, of course," said Miss Rawlins. "But, you see, we're guests of the college to dinner and tea, and we can't very well turn up and say, 'Please we've come, and we've

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brought all the rest of the school with us ! ' "

Ivy suggested that they could take a picnic lunch, or go to a café, but in the end Miss Rawlins agreed to stretch a point and include Beryl and Mandy in the party.

To get to Eastmouth the team had to cross by launch to Little Shelby, take a local train to Wilderton Junction (a fifteen-mile journey, which took an hour and twenty minutes precisely) and there join the main-line express for Eastmouth.

The team was accompanied part way by two or three other mistresses, among them Mlle. Frogart, who was understood to be going to London for the day. At Wilderton, mademoiselle took leave of the party, saying that as she had some time to wait she would go and have coffee in the village.

To girls who had been shut up on an island for several weeks the journey was something of an adventure, and there was much merriment *en route*. One of the bigger girls, Eileen Dale, cajoled the guard into lending her his coat and hat, and with a green flag sticking out of her pocket she passed down the corridor, demanding " Tickets, please," in a deep voice, and setting all the passengers

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fumbling in their handbags or waistcoat pockets, only to discover they had been hoaxed by a guard with dimples and a skirt ! One crusty old lady, however, complained, and threatened to write to the company about it, whereupon Miss Rawlins intervened and put an end to the prank, much to the disgust of the rest of the party, who were greatly enjoying the joke.

Eastmouth was reached at noon, and the captain and two or three others of the home team were on the platform to welcome the visitors. Greta, the Eastmouth captain, nicknamed "Pongo" by her admirers for no apparent reason, was a well-built, athletic girl of nineteen. Rather on the large side, but with a quick, alert eye, and a manner that bespoke abounding self-confidence, she played full-back, and represented the most formidable defence that Eastmouth College had ever had. Doris Mackie, St. Meredith's centre-forward, declared that Greta had been sent to meet the team in order to inspire them with terror.

The college, which stood on the northern outskirts of the town, occupied a delightful position on high ground overlooking the cliffs, with nothing but rolling fields of oats

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and barley between the school buildings and the sea. Here a warm welcome awaited them, and, what was equally important to Ivy, a good dinner, to which all the visitors, without exception, did justice.

The match was timed to start at three o'clock, and Ivy calculated that they would just be able after dinner to get down to the town, do the necessary shopping, and return to the college in time for the bully-off. Notifying Miss Rawlins of their intention, they set off at a brisk walk, and twenty minutes later arrived in the main shopping thoroughfare—only to discover that all the shops were shut for the luncheon-hour, and were not due to open again till two-fifteen.

"Here's a pretty go!" exclaimed Beryl. "Half an hour to wait, and all that way to get back! We'll never do it by three!"

"Can't be helped," said Mandy. "Shopping's the most important. We *needn't* be at the match at all."

Ivy's eye caught sight of the hanging sign of an "Oriental Café" in the High Street.

"Come along," she said, "let's go and have some coffee and meringues while we're waiting."

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Although Ivy usually took the lead in such matters, the others were generally ready to follow. Pushing through the swing-doors, they looked round for a table. The main part of the café was fairly full of people—mostly having lunch, but in a sort of extension at the back they found a secluded corner with an empty table, and, seating themselves at this, ordered coffees and cream meringues. In the opposite corner, equally secluded, sat a tall gentleman of foreign appearance, immaculately dressed and with a dark but neatly-trimmed moustache.

The girls sipped their coffee and discussed the details of their shopping, taking no particular notice of their surroundings, except that now and again they observed signs of restlessness on the part of the gentleman in the corner. Apparently he was waiting for someone for he kept looking at his watch, and when the waitress went to take his order he shook his head and replied: "Not yet."

The girls had finished their coffee and were lingering on, waiting till it was time for the shops to open, when suddenly Beryl gave Ivy's sleeve a tug.

"Look what's blown in!" she whispered.

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Through the bead-curtained entrance to the inner room could be seen approaching the compact and pompous figure of Mademoiselle Frogart. The gentleman in the corner had seen her, too. As she entered he rose from his seat and greeted her with a courteous bow, but there was no real welcome in his tone as he spoke.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle,*" he said. "*Vous êtes très en retard !*"

"*Ce n'est pas ma faute,*" retorted Mlle. Frogart. "*Vous savez bien que je ne peux pas choisir mon heure d'arrivée !*"

As she spoke she turned in the girls' direction and caught sight of the familiar school colours. A momentary look of surprise and annoyance crossed her features, and bending quickly towards the stranger she whispered something to him. He nodded, and stole a furtive glance at Ivy and her companions; then, beckoning the waitress, he ordered lunch for two.

Feeling themselves in the way, the girls stayed only a few minutes longer, and then took their departure, leaving mademoiselle and her companion deep in whispered conversation. They wandered round the narrow

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streets, looking at the shop windows, until the luncheon hour was over, and then commencing with a big drapery emporium, began to make their purchases.

Their shopping took them longer than they expected, and before they realised how the time had flown it was nearly three o'clock. They had still one or two purchases to make, and this they did with all speed. Then, leaving the whole of their parcels in charge of an obliging shopkeeper, to be called for on their way home, they hurried out of the town and up the hill to the college.

"What's the score?" they asked breathlessly of the first group of girls they came across.

"One to Pongo!" replied the girl addressed, at which the others near by laughed.

"What d'you mean?" demanded Ivy.

"One-nil against us?"

"No," admitted the first speaker; "there's no score yet, really. Only your inside-right's knocked out."

"Knocked out—how?" asked Beryl, in alarm.

"Got a ball on the nose," replied their informant. "One of Pongo's best!"

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"How long ago?"

"About ten minutes."

So poor Edie Lovell had been knocked out, and the team were playing a forward short! And Ivy, the reserve, had not been there when she was wanted!

As the three hurried towards the pavilion, Miss Rawlins came running to meet them.

"Oh, Ivy, I've been looking for you all over the place," she exclaimed. "Wherever have you been?"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Ivy; "but we had to wait for the shops to open. Is Edie much hurt?"

"Nothing serious," replied Miss Rawlins; "but she won't be able to go on again. You'll have to play inside right in the second half."

Ivy hurried into the pavilion to get ready. Edie was lying on the floor with a basin of water by her side and a couple of the college mistresses bathing her face.

"Hard luck, Edie," cried Ivy, proceeding to change her boots. "How did it happen?"

"I went to stop a hard drive by that hefty full-back," replied Edie, "and somehow I sliced the ball and it jumped and bashed me on the nose. How's the game going?"

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"There's no score yet," said Ivy, "and it's nearly half-time, but the play's all down our end, and the backs are having their work cut out to stop Eastmouth from getting through. I'm glad Connie's playing goal; she's topping."

The whistle sounded for half-time, and both teams, relaxing to their utmost, stood about the field in little groups—St. Meredith's breathless but determined; Eastmouth College confident and impatient to resume.

"They're putting on their reserve in the second half," announced the Eastmouth captain to her centre-forward. "You know, the little fat girl with the red hair. She's playing inside-right, though I shouldn't imagine she could run for toffee. Still, it won't matter much; it'll be their backs who'll be doing all the work."

The change of ends did not give either side any advantage, for the ground was dead level, but the appearance of Ivy on the field seemed to put fresh heart into St. Meredith's team as they took their places for the second half.

Eastmouth forwards, determined to make the most of the moral advantage which was

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theirs already, opened the attack with a quick rush down the field, and for a while St. Meredith's goal appeared to be in danger. The defence, however, proved equal to the occasion, and after a stiff tussle, the position was once again relieved.

A long struggle ensued, in which the attackers were gradually forced farther and farther back, the game straying from side to side of the field in an indeterminate manner. At last, however, the St. Meredith's forwards got hold of the ball, and in very pretty style succeeded in breaking through the college team's first line of defence. For a moment St. Meredith's hopes ran high, but in the nick of time Pongo, the Eastmouth captain, intervened, and with apparent ease brought the attack to a standstill. Time and again the Eastmouth goal was threatened, but try as they might the St. Meredith's forwards were unable to get past the formidable defence put up by Pongo and her colleague.

It was clear, however, that the visitors were now getting the best of the game, even though they had not succeeded in scoring, and Ivy noted hopefully that the home team showed signs of losing confidence. It seemed to her

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that St. Meredith's were not so much playing against Eastmouth as against time—and Pongo. No wonder Pongo was looked up to by her side as a kind of Goliath.

A Goliath? The thought ran whimsically through her mind that if Pongo was a Goliath among the Philistines, there ought to be a David on the other side. Herself? Ivy was far too modest to picture herself in such a role, and far too unselfish in the field to attempt the spectacular by tackling the task of getting past the Goliath single-handed. And yet——

Again the St. Meredith's forwards had the ball, and were speeding down the field in perfect combination. Inside-left received the ball from outside-left, and passed it to centre-forward. Doris, faced with an impenetrable defence, passed to Ivy, who darted forward, making a bee-line for the goal. Thundering down upon her came Pongo, confident as ever, amidst the encouraging cheers of the crowd beyond the touchline.

“Pass, Ivy, pass!” shouted half-a-dozen voices.

But Ivy's mind was made up. Momentarily putting the Eastmouth captain off her guard

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by a feigned pass to outside right, she executed a quick turning movement, and for a moment saw the goal clear before her and but ten yards away. In turning, however, she sent the ball just a trifle beyond her reach. Straining every nerve, she leapt forward, slipped and fell, but in desperation, even as she fell, she swung her stick at arm's length, and, reaching the ball more by luck than judgment, sent it spinning towards the far corner of the Eastmouth goal. Seeing Ivy fall, the goalkeeper appeared unprepared for this shot. With a tardy but heroic effort she leapt to stop it, but too late. The ball came to rest fairly and squarely in the net just behind the post.

A mighty cheer went up from the St. Meredith's team. The first goal had been scored, and it was theirs ! For the moment the college spectators appeared stunned, then they, too, joined sportingly in the applause.

Before they could stop themselves, two or three of the Eastmouth team had tripped and fallen over Ivy's prostrate form. She picked herself up and walked back to her place on the field with a painful limp.

" Hurt much ? " inquired Pongo, kindly, as she hurried by.

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"No ; it's nothing," replied Ivy. "Just twisted my leg a bit. I'll be all right."

"Come along, Eastmouth ! Pull yourselves together !" shouted their captain. "There's only two minutes more. Play for all you're worth."

Redoubling their efforts, Eastmouth opened the attack, this time with Pongo as centre-forward. They made but little progress, however, and before the captain's weight in the forward line had begun to tell, a long blast on the whistle announced that the game was over. For the first time in history, St. Meredith's had beaten Eastmouth College.

Ivy, of course, was carried off the field in triumph, and at the tea which followed was accorded the place of honour next to the Eastmouth captain. The home team took their defeat in a truly sportsmanlike fashion, Pongo generously declaring that St. Meredith's had given them the finest game they had ever had and thoroughly deserved their victory.

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CHAPTER X.

A STRANGER COMES TO FAIRBY.

The news of St. Meredith's victory reached Fairby by telephone long before the team arrived home, and a royal welcome awaited them. Flags were hung across the vestibule, and the wall was decorated with "See the Conquering Heroes Come," "Well Played, Ivy," "What's the matter with St. Meredith's," and other slogans of a like nature. Edie's bruised nose and Ivy's twisted leg were objects almost of veneration by the small girls of IIIB, who gazed in awe upon the wounded warriors. Little groups of girls surrounded the various members of the team, and listened breathlessly to all the details of the match, while Maud and Emily hovered outside the kitchen door, straining their ears to catch as much as they could of the thrilling story.

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Enthusiasm over the match was still running high the following day, and Ivy found herself much sought after by girls who were anxious to bask in the reflected glory of the hero of the hour. These attentions, however, made her feel uncomfortable, for she fully realised that her own contribution to the victory was no greater than that of any of the rest of the team.

"Let's get away on our own," she said to Beryl, when for a moment they were alone together. "I'm fed up with all this fuss."

Beryl, to whom Ivy was a greater hero than ever, was ready enough to fall in with this proposition, so immediately after dinner the two slipped away unobserved and, armed with a book apiece, crossed the playing-fields to the gorse-covered countryside beyond.

"Let's get into the woods and work our way down to the shore, where we went that first morning," suggested Beryl. "We shall be quiet there. Half the school will be out here in an hour's time."

Ivy agreed, and the two followed the line of the barbed-wire fence until well out of sight of the school, then, clambering through, they plunged into the heart of the wood, and

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forced their way through the tangled undergrowth to where the brook, swollen as the result of a shower of rain the previous night, gurgled over its stony bed and formed tiny waterfalls where fallen branches and stray boulders blocked its path.

For a while the girls lingered by the brook and slowly followed its course, which wound here, there, and everywhere among the trees, as if uncertain how to find its way to the sea. Then, continuing their journey, they made their way to the coast.

The beach was absolutely deserted as far as eye could see, and, choosing a spot near the water's edge, where a ridge of shingle formed a convenient resting-place, the two settled down for a quiet hour or so with their favourite authors.

They had been reading for perhaps twenty minutes, when Ivy looked up and scanned the broad expanse of water which separated them from Little Shelby, with its white cottages and green meadows. Apart from a red-sailed barge gliding lazily toward the little harbour, there was no sign of life upon the water, except that, far away to westward, the sails of a three-masted barque gleamed

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white and entrancing in the afternoon sun. Presently, however, as she gazed seawards, Ivy became aware of a tiny brown speck in the far distance, which she watched for a time with idle interest. Gradually the speck grew bigger, until at last Ivy was able to discern the shape of a motor launch, ploughing its way through the water and apparently making straight for Fairby.

"I wonder what these people want," she said, calling Beryl's attention to the oncoming craft. "It's months since a boat came as near to the island as that. D'you think they're going to land?"

The girls watched the launch until she was within a couple of hundred yards of shore. Then, altering her course to westward, the little vessel followed the line of the coast until she disappeared from view round the point of the island.

"They're looking for the jetty," said Beryl. "Come on; let's go and see who it is."

"They'll be there and away again long before we can get there!" observed Ivy. "That is, unless they've come to tea."

Jumping to their feet, the two made their way over the shingle as quickly as possible

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towards a small clearing on the fringe of the wood, from which a path of sorts led in the direction of the school. Both Ivy and Beryl knew the path of old, and followed it until, at the top of a gentle incline, it took a sharp turn to the left. Here, leaving the footpath, they scrambled through the undergrowth, and after a few minutes found themselves on the woodland track which led to the door of the north tower.

"Now we've come this way we'll have to get out through the gate," whispered Ivy. "So go quietly, and we'll watch our opportunity. There'd be a row if we were seen."

She made her way to the gate and peeped over. To her surprise the place was completely deserted. The unusual sight of a strange launch approaching the jetty had acted like a magnet, and drawn the whole school down to the waterside.

Ivy and Beryl boldly crossed the lawn and, running down the gravel drive and through the main gates, took the road leading shorewards. Already a tall stranger had disembarked from the launch, and was walking towards the school, while two men in white duck trousers and caps and smartly-cut blue

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coats remained on board the boat, which rose and fell lazily in the swell.

Little groups of girls stood about or sauntered up and down the road, doing their best not to appear inquisitive, though in fact they were dying to know who the stranger was and what his business might be. As he approached, Ivy and Beryl slackened their pace to a slow walk and gazed admiringly at the tall, stately figure.

All at once Beryl gave a little gasp of astonishment.

"D'you see who it is, Ivy?" she whispered. "It's that man who was in the café at Eastmouth yesterday with Froggy!"

"So it is!" exclaimed Ivy, when the stranger had passed them. "Don't say he's coming here to visit *her*!"

In their astonishment they had forgotten all rules of propriety and were staring after the visitor with undisguised curiosity, when they saw in the distance, emerging from the school gates, none other than Mlle. Frogart herself, accompanied by two or three of the other mistresses.

"Look, she's coming to meet him!" exclaimed Ivy, adding, as she remembered

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the somewhat chilly greeting in the café, "I wonder if they'll be any better pleased to see each other to-day."

"Do let's go and see what happens," said Beryl.

The side of the road at this point was thickly lined with trees, on the other side of which ran a footpath more or less parallel with the road. It had been worn away in the grass by the feet of many girls, anxious to get away from the beaten track. Making for this, Ivy and Beryl hurried along it until they were almost abreast of the stranger, and could keep an eye on him without appearing too conspicuous.

He was now but a few yards from the French mistress and her companions, and the girls watched for the stately bow and courteous raising of the hat which, they felt certain, would follow. To their astonishment, however, the man took not the slightest notice of Mlle. Frogart, but walked straight past her as if he had never met her before in his life.

Nor did she, on her part, give him as much as a glance of recognition—or even appear to share the natural interest in the presence of a stranger which the other mistresses displayed.

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" Well, I'm blest ! " exclaimed Ivy. " What do you make of that ? "

Beryl stood still for a minute and gazed after the retreating figure. Then she shook her head.

" It beats me," she confessed, " completely."

* * * *

Sunday afternoon was a time when Miss Tonks allowed herself a respite from the cares and anxieties of school management. Seated in a deck chair in the sunniest corner of the sheltered garden, she dozed over a light novel which, although interesting enough in its way, did not avail to dispel the tendency to sleep induced by the warm fragrant air and the monotonous murmur of the distant sea. And so it was with something of a start that she awoke to her senses to find Ellen, the maid, standing before her with a visiting card on a tray.

" A visitor ? To-day ? " she exclaimed, in tones of annoyance. " I'm not expecting anyone."

She took the card from the salver and a puzzled frown puckered her forehead.

" Comte de Bourdonne ? Comte de Bour-

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donne ? " she murmured, searching her memory in vain. Then, after a pause, she added, " Show the count into my study, Ellen."

While Ellen hurried along the corridor to escort the visitor to the study Miss Tonks was busy before the mirror, for even Headmistresses like to look their best sometimes. A minute or two later the door opened to admit the tall stranger whose arrival had provided St. Meredith's with a topic of conversation for the rest of the afternoon.

" Monsieur le Comte de Bourdonne, I believe ? " inquired Miss Tonks, offering her hand.

The visitor bowed politely.

" That is my name, madame," he said. The Headmistress motioned him to a chair.

" No doubt you wonder what is the object of my visit, madame," began the count ; " but first let me apologise to you for disturbing the peace and quiet of so perfect a Sunday afternoon."

He spoke with a pronounced foreign accent, which, however, Miss Tonks found rather pleasing, for his tone was suave and his manner courtly.

" I know I am what you call a trespasser

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here, and that my visit will be, *peut-etre*, a little unwelcome. But I have here authority to ask you kindly to permit me to look over these premises. It is from the agents of the owner, in Berne."

The count handed Miss Tonks a letter from a firm of agents on the Continent. It was written in English, and read as follows:—

" The Headmistress,
" St. Meredith's School,
" Fairby Island,
" England.

" MADAME,—The bearer of this letter, M. le Comte de Bourdonne, has received permission from the owner of Fairby Island to look over the property with a view to purchase. We shall esteem it a favour if you will afford him the facilities he desires. We have the honour, madame, to be, Yours sincerely,

" JEAN ROUBET ET FILS."

So the blow had fallen at last! The property was being offered for sale abroad, and soon St. Meredith's, with all its cherished associations, would be in the hands of strangers.

Miss Tonks read the letter and handed it back to the count.

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"Am I right in supposing that Mr. Enderby is on the Continent?" she asked.

The visitor looked, nonplussed.

"Mr. Enderby," he repeated, blankly.

"The owner of the property," added Miss Tonks, in explanation. "His name is Enderby, I believe."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot say, madame," he said; "I deal only with the agents."

"I understand he is wanted by the police in this country," added Miss Tonks, vaguely hoping that the thought of having dealings with a criminal would deter the Frenchman from carrying through the transaction.

"Indeed, is that so?" said her visitor, in a tone of mild surprise. Then, with another shrug of the shoulders he added, as if to himself: "*Eh, bien, cela n'est pas mon affaire!*"

With a heavy heart Miss Tonks rose and led the way into the corridor, and, commencing with the large hall, proceeded to conduct the stranger over the premises.

Evidently the count was well pleased with what he saw, for he kept giving utterance to little expressions of satisfaction, and was

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evidently figuring out the various uses to which the different rooms could be put.

"*Quelle salle de danse !*" he exclaimed, as he stood gazing round the large hall. "It is a pity, madame, to use such a building for a school. It should be the home of wealth, of beauty, of romance !"

The library, he thought, would make a good dining-room, and the small lecture-hall he would have oak-panelled for use as a study.

In the bedrooms he did not take much interest, beyond saying that they would need a lot of alteration ; but the sight of the north tower filled him with enthusiasm.

"*Magnifique !*" he exclaimed, as he gazed upwards at the noble pile of masonry that rose fully fifty feet from the ground. "This might indeed be the residence of a noble family, *n'est ce pas, madame ?*"

Miss Tonks could hardly bring herself to reply ; but at last she said :

"It makes a very delightful school. I can't bear the thought of leaving it. It will be a sad blow to the girls."

"Alas, madame !" replied the Frenchman, sympathetically, "it is always so. We cherish the things to which we are accustomed.

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But this is a matter of business, and business is cruel ! ”

The count expressed a particular desire to see the domestic offices, and Miss Tonks conducted him to the kitchen, where Jane and Emily were busy preparing tea for their large family. With a word of apology to Jane for the disturbance, he glanced round the room and then crossed to the window.

“ This courtyard,” he remarked. “ It is very ancient, *n'est ce pas ?* ”

“ It is the oldest part of the building, I believe,” replied Miss Tonks.

“ Ah ! ” continued the visitor. “ Perhaps you can tell me. The agents say that there is a tradition—a very ancient tradition—that the courtyard is haunted. There is a spectre—they call her the ‘ white lady.’ She is said to walk in the courtyard on moonlight nights, according to the legend.”

Jane, who was at that moment making up the fire, dropped the shovel with a clatter. Emily put down the bread-knife and looked meaningly at the cook.

“ It’s a story invented for the benefit of the credulous,” said the Headmistress. “ I have heard rumours of the kind myself.”

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"But you have seen nothing?" asked the count, almost eagerly.

"Certainly not; it is pure fantasy!"

The Frenchman appeared disappointed.

"It was mentioned to me by the agents, madame, as an attraction," he remarked. Evidently he did not share Miss Tonks' matter-of-fact attitude to such questions.

The cook appeared to be on the point of speaking, but a stern glance from the Head-mistress quelled her intention.

With a slight but precise bow to the kitchen staff the distinguished visitor crossed the room and followed his guide into the corridor.

* * * * *

At a safe distance Ivy and her chum had followed the stranger to the door of St. Meredith's. Then, as he disappeared within, they held a consultation.

"You're sure it's the same man?" queried Ivy.

"Positive."

"They must have seen each other."

"Of course they must."

"Then why did they pretend not to?" asked Ivy, adding, as if in answer to her own question: "Perhaps they've quarrelled?"

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Beryl laughed at Ivy's romantic train of thought, and shook her head.

"I don't think there's anything like that in it," she said. "Besides, if they had, why should he come here at all?"

Ivy tried to think of some other solution.

"I don't know what to make of it," continued Beryl. "But, anyway, I think we ought to watch Froggy and see what he does. He's foreign, that's clear enough, and he seems to have some business at the school, but I'd like to know what it is."

The two strolled back in the direction of the shore, and not far from the main gates they met Mlle. Frogart coming back alone. In the distance the other mistresses could be seen taking a stroll along the beach.

"She's got rid of the others, and has come back to meet him," declared Beryl, feeling like a budding Sherlock Holmes. "What we've got to do is to follow her and never let her out of our sight."

They turned and retraced their steps to the vestibule, where the French mistress was apparently engaged in reading the school notices. For some time she affected to be unaware of the girls' presence, but after a while, seeing

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that they were not inclined to move away, she turned with a look of annoyance and, passing down the corridor, entered the library.

Ivy and Beryl were also seized with a desire to consult one of the works of reference in the library, and passed through the swing doors almost before Mlle. Frogart had had time to seat herself at a table. Evidently the book that the French mistress had chosen was not to her liking, for she closed it with an impatient gesture, jammed it back in its place on the shelf, and strutted out of the room.

"We don't want her to suspect we're following her," said Ivy. "We'd better stay here for a bit."

Fearing that they might be cheated of their quarry, the two girls lingered for a while in the library, and then returned to the vestibule.

There was no sign of mademoiselle. The vestibule was deserted. Once again they read the school notices, many of which they already knew by heart, but at last their patience was rewarded by the sound of footsteps and voices in the corridor. Reflected in the glass panel of the library door they could see Miss Tonks and the tall stranger coming from the

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direction of the south wing. At the same moment the door of the mistresses' common room opened and Mlle. Frogart appeared. Passing through the vestibule, she lingered for a moment in the porch, and then turned back. As she did so the Headmistress and her visitor turned the corner.

"It is indeed a charming place," the count was saying, "and the situation is delightful. I am much indebted to you, madame, for your kindness in showing me round."

Miss Tonks begged him, politely, not to mention it. She could not be so untrue to herself as to say that it had been a pleasure.

Wishing the Headmistress "Good-day," the count bowed, and turned to go. Just at that moment Mlle. Frogart crossed the vestibule and disappeared into the corridor. As she did so, she passed within a couple of feet of the count, and the girls did not fail to notice that there passed between them a slight but unmistakable glance of recognition.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SURPRISE CONCERT.

The great day of the concert had arrived, and Dormitory Nineteen was all agog with excitement. Despite a good deal of curiosity as to the mysterious nightly doings in the small lecture hall, the secret had been well kept, so that it came as a real surprise to the school in general when, at breakfast that morning, Miss Tonks called upon Ivy Morland to make an announcement.

Somewhat nervously, Ivy rose in her place, her cheeks scarlet at the knowledge that every face was turned in her direction.

"I want to invite everybody," she said, "to a concert which Dormitory Nineteen and Dormitory Twenty-seven are giving to-night in the large hall. It starts directly after prep."

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There were a lot of other things she wanted to say, but she couldn't think of them at the moment, so she sat down.

A murmur of mild excitement filled the room, which, however, died away to silence when it was noticed that Miss Tonks had risen and was waiting for the girls' attention. The Headmistress' face wore a genial smile.

"I have another announcement," she said, "to add to the one Ivy has made. It is that, in consequence of the entertainment to which we have been invited (and I am sure we shall all accept with thanks), the whole school will be excused preparation this evening."

Something like a cheer greeted this last sentence and the Headmistress had to wait quite a while before she could finish her remarks. At last she was able to make herself heard sufficiently to announce that the concert would begin at seven o'clock, and that the supper-bell would ring a quarter of an hour after the concert was over.

The rest of the meal-time was occupied by interested speculations as to what part in the entertainment each of the performers would take.

"I didn't know any of that crowd could do

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anything concerty," observed Katie Richards.

"Oh, well, we'll go, anyway," said her friend Ethel; "it'll be a rag."

The equipment of the stage had been carefully planned overnight, and everything was ready for a speedy setting of the scene for Ivy's play. Morrison, the groundsman, who was something of an electrician (St. Meredith's made its own electricity, and it was part of Morrison's duties to attend to the plant) had been prevailed upon to fit up some footlights. These, and the red plush curtains kept for such occasions, gave the "theatre" quite a professional appearance, and Ivy's mind was full of misgivings lest the quality of the performance might not be up to expectations.

Her position as junior games captain at Wallingdean had given Ivy some useful experience in matters of organisation, and each of her six fellow artistes had been supplied with a list of duties, carefully apportioned, so that there should be no overlapping and no confusion on the day itself. Rita and Barbara, for instance, were responsible for the programmes, Marion for the scenery, and Mandy for the costumes. The music and prompt copies were entrusted to Beryl, who was to

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share the honour of accompanist with Rita. Ruth had to see to arranging the seats in the hall, while Ivy herself had the task of general supervision, and was, in fact, by far the hardest worked of all.

While the small girls of IIIB counted the hours till seven o'clock, Ivy and her friends wished the time would pass more slowly; there seemed such a lot to do! But by a quarter to seven all was in readiness, and Rita and Barbara were in their places waiting to show the audience to their seats and to present each one with a programme. The programmes were Rita's handiwork. Artistically designed, they had been copied on the school duplicator, and were much admired by mistresses and girls alike.

The place of honour, reserved for Miss Tonks, was the centre seat in the fourth row, the three rows in front being kept for the smallest girls, who could not be expected to see over the mistresses' heads.

Directly the door was opened the hall began to fill, and by five minutes to seven a glance round the room told Ivy that there was scarcely a girl missing, and that all the mistresses had arrived—with one exception.

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Miss Tonks, too, had noticed the exception.

"Where is Mlle. Frogart?" she whispered to the mistress on her right.

"She's in the library," replied Miss Rawlins. "Shall I go and fetch her?"

"I think you might," said Miss Tonks. "She must have forgotten about the concert. The girls will be so disappointed if she's not here."

Miss Rawlins left the hall and returned a few minutes later with Mlle. Frogart, who took her seat at the end of the fourth row.

Punctually at seven o'clock the lights in the hall were lowered, and the heavy plush curtains parted to reveal a carpeted stage tastefully decorated with palms and ferns, the grand piano occupying a prominent position.

The next moment Beryl appeared, and with a nervous bow seated herself at the piano and began to play her opening solo. It was clear that she was feeling very self-conscious, but on the whole, she managed quite well, and although the audience did not appear to regard her performance as worthy of an encore, it at least served to break the ice.

The next item was *Just a Song at Twilight*, sung by Ivy, with the rest of the company as

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chorus. The peculiar sweetness of Ivy's voice, and the subdued harmony of the chorus, found a ready response, and round after round of applause compelled Ivy to come on again with her only available encore, *The Slave Song*.

This, though not such a success as the former item, went down well, and the audience then were entertained by Marion in a clever rendering of *Matilda*, from Belloc's *Cautionary Tales*. Two more "tales" of the same series had to be recited by Marion before the audience would let her go.

Pale Hands followed, from the *Indian Love Lyrics*, rendered very effectively by Beryl, who followed it up by singing *A Bowl of Roses*. Miss Tonks could not help expressing surprise at the musical talent of which she had hitherto been unaware.

The next item came as a complete change. Attired in the quaint poke-bonnets which country-women are supposed to wear (but don't) Rita and Barbara took possession of the stage for their dialogue, *Geese*. The piece was a great success. It is true that Rita was a bit uncertain as to whether the dialect should be Cockney or Devonshire, and the prompter

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had to come several times to Barbara's assistance, but the audience readily overlooked these little defects and applauded vigorously.

From behind the curtains Ivy stole a glance at the audience. By the reflected light from the stage (the hall itself was in darkness) she could discern the intent look of interest written on every face. Even Miss Tonks was obviously enjoying the performance, for she laughed and applauded as heartily as anyone. Only the pallid face at the end of the fourth row appeared to be out of harmony with the spirit of entertainment. Sullen and inexpressive, it just looked stolidly on.

"Poor Froggy can't be feeling very well to-night," whispered Ivy. "She doesn't seem to be enjoying it a bit."

"She's a pig," asserted Marion. "It's only because she hates you being so popular."

Before Ivy could reply, Beryl hurried them on to the stage for their song from the *Mikado*.

Three Little Maids is deplorably short—especially when quantity as well as quality is demanded, and the only way in which the trio could satisfy the audience was to sing the whole thing over twice.

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After that came Mandy. It was one of Ivy's troubles at the rehearsals that Mandy never seemed to be able to do the same thing twice running in the same way, so that nobody knew exactly what to expect. Very anxiously the girls in the wings watched her help herself to a chair and take up a central position on the stage.

"I want to give a little imitation," she announced, "of matron, darning the stockings of the junior girls."

Matron's face, in the audience, was a study.

Putting on a pair of glasses, and peering around her over the rims—a mannerism for which the matron was noted—Mandy commenced her imaginary task. Evidently there were a lot of stockings to darn, for the pile was so high that she could hardly reach the top. Taking the first pair, she unrolled them, thrust her hand down to the toes in search of holes, threaded a needle, and began to darn. The darn completed (in about ten seconds) she rolled up the stockings and placed them on the floor beside her. With each pair of stockings the speed increased, until the poor "matron" was working with lightning

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rapidity, and the pile on the one side grew taller as that on the other disappeared.

When her task was finished, the "matron" mopped her brow, put away her glasses, and picking up the imaginary pile of mending, made her exit into the wings.

The audience evidently enjoyed this little skit on the matron, and the matron enjoyed it, too. Mandy was obliged to respond to a deafening encore, and scored an equal success with her representation of Miss Callow, the maths. mistress, explaining a problem of Euclid on an imaginary blackboard. Still the audience clammered for more, and Mandy had to fall back on her original topic of an imitation of the Headmistress presenting the sports prizes.

Throughout the prize-giving, it appeared, the Headmistress was continually being pestered by a mosquito—a reference to an actual occurrence at the last sports prize-giving which had caused some amusement. The girls were quick to see the allusion, and roared with laughter, but nobody laughed more heartily than Miss Tonks herself.

"I thought you said Mandy was a dunce," she whispered to Miss Callow.

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"So she is—at maths.," replied the mistress; "but at this sort of thing she's an artist!"

One more item remained before the interval—the dance by Ruth, Rita, and Barbara. For this the platform had to be cleared by Mandy and Marion, and the piano pushed back into the farthest corner. Then, to the accompaniment of dainty music, Ruth tripped lightly on to the stage and beckoned her two companions from the wings.

The audience watched, entranced. Ruth in a gossamer frock bespangled with silver tinsel, looked positively beautiful, while Rita and Barbara were surely as dainty fairies as any that had ever danced by moonlight on the lawn of St. Meredith's.

There was a delightful lack of self-consciousness on the part of the three girls. To all appearances they were dancing for the sheer joy of the dance, and the audience seemed to catch something of their infectious spirit of lightheartedness. Again and again the dancers were called back, until they had no breath left to dance any more. It was a day of triumph for Ruth. She had lived down her unenviable reputation; from now onwards

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she had a new standard to live up to, a standard that was worth the sacrifice of all the selfish pleasures she had previously held so dear.

The curtains swung together and the lights in the hall went up. A moment later, Marion appeared in front of the stage and announced that there would be an interval of five minutes, during which the scene would be set for Ivy's play. Like all such intervals, it lasted a long five minutes, but presently an expectant hush fell as the lights in the hall were again lowered, leaving the red curtains of the platform brightly lit up by the foot-lights. The second part of the entertainment had begun.

CHAPTER XII.

IVY'S PLAY.

THE SECRET OF THE WELL

A PLAY, BY IVY MORLAND.

CHARACTERS :

LOBELIA, COUNTESS OF MURGATROYD	BERYL TAYLOR.
PAMELA BROOKLYN (her niece) ..	RITA PRIEST.
SIR HENRY DE MURGATROYD (her ancestor)	MARION KEMP.
HENRY DOCKETT, OF SCRIVENER AND DOCKETT, SOLICITORS	MARION KEMP.
PERKINS (the butler)	RUTH SIMMONS.
ROSALIE (a maid)	BARBARA WOOD.

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SCENE.—*The Library, Broadacre Castle, Farfield,
Chalkshire.*

TIME.—*The present.*

PRODUCER IVY MORLAND.

PROMPTER MANDY BREWER.

*(During the play the curtain will be drawn for one
minute to represent the lapse of an hour.)*

* * * * *

So ran the programme.

A bell rang, and the curtains parted, to reveal the interior of an ancestral mansion, whose furnishings, however, were hardly up to the standard of elegance usually demanded by the aristocracy.

That it was a library was clear from the imposing rows of books arranged on a series of shelves to the right of the stage.

Anyone looking at all carefully at these must have been impressed by the studious tastes of the inhabitants of Broadacre Castle. There were dozens and dozens of Latin grammars, a large number of histories, geo-

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graphies, and the like, two score at least of books on algebra, and here and there a Greek Syntax or French Dictionary to lend variety to the learned array.

In the left-hand corner a suit of armour (not unlike one which usually graced the school museum) gave a mediæval touch to the scene, but the thing which really proved beyond all doubt that this was part of some baronial hall, and not a room in a second-hand book-seller's shop, was a large, gilt-framed picture, which occupied the centre of the wall opposite the footlights. The bottom of the picture could not be seen, because of a table which stood in the centre of the room, but it was clear that it represented a life-size portrait of the founder of the family fortunes, one Henry de Murgatroyd. Dressed in the courtly attire of a cavalier of King Charles' reign, he held in one hand a wineglass half-filled with a brownish fluid resembling cold tea, and in the other a scroll—this because the artist was at a loss to know what to do with the hand that wasn't required to hold the glass.

Down near the footlights, and toasting her toes before a very ruddy fire, sat a lady of high degree, with a mass of white hair done up in

a lofty coiffure, and richly bejewelled. The audience recognised her at once as the chate-laine of Broadacre—Lobelia, Countess of Murgatroyd.

The countess was deeply engrossed in a Latin grammar, which she was holding up-side-down. She seemed to find it interesting, however, for she scanned several pages carefully and then, passing her hand across her forehead as if weary, turned and touched a button near the fireplace.

A roar of laughter from the audience greeted the entry of the butler. Not that the part was intended to be funny, but Ruth, who had been chosen for it, was several sizes smaller than the only evening-dress suit which (through the kindness of Mr. Morland) they had been able to borrow for the occasion.

"Perkins," commanded the countess, in a haughty voice, "put this book back in the bookcase."

"Yes, my lady," replied the butler, doing as he was bid. "Would your ladyship care for another?"

"No, thanks, Perkins," drawled the countess; "I think I will retire to bed."

"It's early yet, your ladyship," observed

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the honest Perkins: "I was just going to serve the coffee."

"I have a headache," replied the countess, passing her hand again across her forehead. "We will not have coffee to-night."

"Very good, your ladyship," said the butler, bowing and preparing to withdraw. "If I might recommend a hot lemon——"

"That will do, Perkins. I do not accept medical advice from my domestic staff."

The countess rose haughtily from her chair.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," murmured the butler, moving towards the door.

"Perkins!"

"Yes, my lady?"

"Perkins, I have noticed lately a certain lack of respect in your demeanour. Let me have no more of it, please. I should be very sorry to have to disperse with your services after all these years. That will do."

"Yes, my lady."

By this time the butler had reached the door, and was about to open it when the countess again stopped him: "Perkins!"

"Yes, my lady?"

"If any visitors should call, my niece will entertain them in the drawing-room."

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"Very good, my lady."

"Now will you send Rosalie to me for instructions at once!"

"If you please, my lady, your ladyship's maid is not on duty this evening," observed the butler in his most deferential tone.

"Not on duty!" exclaimed the countess, angrily. "Who says she's not on duty? Rosalie is always on duty when I require her."

"Yes, my lady; but Thursday is her evening out, and I happen to know she has an appointment at eight o'clock with——"

"That will do, Perkins. Send Rosalie to me at once."

"Very good, my lady."

Once again the unfortunate butler made for the door, only to be called back.

"Perkins!"

"Yes, my lady?"

"You will take a month's notice from to-day."

The poor butler looked dumbfounded.

"My lady!" he exclaimed. "You can't mean it?"

"I have told you to take a month's notice," replied the countess; "need I say more? Isn't one notice enough?"

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"But my lady—"

"That will do, Perkins. You have no dependents. I will give you a character—of sorts. You will be able to secure another place. Now go!"

Poor Perkins bowed and went. The countess stood for a while in front of the portrait of her great ancestor, contemplating his stately figure through her lorgnette. Presently the door opened and a trim little maid entered.

"Your ladyship sent for me?"

There was just a trace of pertness and defiance in Rosalie's tone. It was not submissive and deferential, as Perkins' had been. Evidently something had upset her.

"I am feeling far from well this evening," announced the countess, languidly. "I am about to retire to bed. You may cover up Sir Henry."

The maid crossed to where the ancestor glowered haughtily from his frame, and drew a dark blue curtain across the picture.

"Now go to Miss Pamela's room and tell her I want her—at once."

"Yes, my lady. Will you require me again this evening?"

"Require you again? Of course I shall

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require you again ! I shall want you to help me undress, and brush my hair, and assist me into bed."

"Your ladyship has forgotten that it is my evening out. I have an appoint——"

"That will do. I have heard enough about your evening out from the butler already. Take my message to Miss Pamela and then prepare my room. I shall require three hot-water bottles to-night."

Rosalie did not reply, but with a rather angry little jerk of the head she turned and walked to the door. The Countess of Murgatroyd watched her through her lorgnette.

"Rosalie !"

The maid paused, with her hand upon the door-knob.

"Yes, my lady ?"

"You will take a month's notice from to-day."

"A month's notice ?"

"I said a month's notice."

"Yes, my lady. I was about to give a month's notice. Your ladyship has saved me the trouble!" and the maid left the room, slamming the door behind her.

The countess returned to her place by the

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fireside, where she seated herself with great dignity to await the arrival of her niece. She did not have long to wait, for almost at once the door opened and Pamela entered. Her face was demure and her manner subdued. In her hand she held a stocking, which she was evidently in the middle of darning.

"Did you send for me, auntie?"

"Of course I did," snapped her aunt. "You don't suppose Rosalie invented the message, do you?"

"Not altogether," admitted Pamela.

"What do you mean—not altogether?" demanded the countess.

"Well, I don't suppose you told her to say all she did say," replied the girl, fidgeting.

"Oh, and what *did* she say?" inquired the countess.

In the demurest possible voice, Pamela replied:

"She said: 'That old vixen in the library wants you, Miss Pamela, and you'd better go at once, because she's in a beast of a temper.'"

"Oh, Rosalie said that, did she!" exclaimed the countess, angrily. "I will deal with her later. Come here, child. Haven't you got those stockings darned yet?"

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"No, auntie," replied Pamela, moving nervously towards the countess.

"Have you finished my blue gown?"

"No, auntie."

"Have you written those letters?"

"No, auntie."

"Then whatever have you been doing all this time?"

"I've been reading—only since dinner, though," added Pamela.

"Reading? Reading? How dare you neglect your work to read!"

"Well, auntie, I'd been working all the morning and afternoon, and I thought——"

"How dare you 'think,' you ungrateful little hussy! If it weren't for the fact that I'm your legal guardian, I'd pack you off with a month's notice as I have Perkins and Rosalie, you good-for-nothing baggage! To think that the law should compel me to be plagued by an idle, worthless little madam who knows neither her place nor her duties!"

"But, auntie, mayn't I ever read?" pleaded Pamela.

The countess gave her a withering look.

"Books," she said, "were intended for ladies of leisure—not for needlewomen."

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There comes a point at which even a worm will turn.

"How *dare* you call me a needlewoman, auntie!" demanded Pamela, with unusual feeling. "I'm your niece, and you ought to treat me decently. Besides, if I *am* your needlewoman, I do at least earn my keep, which is more than you do! *You'd* never have been the Countess of Murgatroyd if that ferry boat hadn't been run down and everybody except you drowned. If only the baby'd been saved—yes, I've heard Rosalie talk about it—he'd have been the count now, and *you'd* be a needlewoman. I know you hadn't any money of your own. Perkins says so. He says you lost it all at Monte Carlo!"

"Insolence! Insolence!" exclaimed the countess. "What Sir Henry would say to such a scene I simply dare not think! It's a good thing he's covered up for the night!"

The door opened and Rosalie appeared.

"Your room is ready for you, my lady," she said. "And there are *five* hot-water bottles in the bed."

The countess swept across the room, one fuming mass of offended dignity.

"I am going to bed, Pamela," she said.

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"Your conduct has upset me beyond all bearing. You will stay here and continue your darning. You will not retire until it is finished. If any visitors call you will interview them here."

With that she sailed out of the room, followed by Rosalie, who, however, paused at the door to exchange a glance of sympathy with Pamela. As soon as the door was closed Pamela threw her darning on the floor and stamped on it. Then, going to the portrait of the ancestor, she flung the curtain aside.

"You!" she exclaimed, "you are the cause of all this! Started the House of Murgatroyd, did you? I hope you're proud of it! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you ugly, stupid old fossil! A fine sort of ancestor you are, standing there drinking cold tea year after year when you ought to be down here teaching Aunt Lobelia how to behave like a lady!"

She crossed the room to the bookshelves, and stood for a time evidently wrestling with temptation, for now and again her glance wandered to the undarned stocking lying on the floor. At last, however, duty prevailed. She picked up the stocking, seated herself in

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the chair by the fire, and began to darn. Her fingers, however, seemed tired; and after a while she stopped darning and sat motionless, staring into the fire.

Then a most peculiar thing happened. The ancestor in the picture was seen to move his head. Instead of glaring vacantly into space he glanced at the wineglass and raised it to his lips as if about to drink. Then, changing his mind, he turned the glass upside down and the contents fell upon the floor.

Pamela jumped and looked round just in time to see Sir Henry step slowly out of his frame on to a chair which stood conveniently beneath it, and from that to the floor. She rose from her seat in astonishment, while the ancestor hobbled painfully to the centre of the room and rested his glass upon the table.

"You, Sir Henry!"

"Aye, 'tis me right enough," observed the ancestor. "But bestrew me if these legs of mine will move after standing all these centuries in one position. 'Twas a great effort of mine that wrenched me free from yonder canvas."

"When auntie feels stiff she takes a turn on the links," observed Pamela.

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"Links, wench? Methinks no links could hold a man faster than the sticky varnish of yon painter's brush!"

"I mean golf, you know. Auntie plays golf."

Sir Henry shook his head.

"'Tis a new instrument," he said. "Doth she play it well?"

"Golf's not an instrument; it's a game," explained Pamela. "And auntie plays rottenly."

"A game, forsooth? Methinks no game will ever beat the bear-baiting and cock-fighting of King Charles' reign."

"Oh, we don't go in for that sort of sport nowadays," said Pamela. "We play hockey, cricket, and tennis. At least, other girls do. I'm afraid you'll find things very changed. Are you staying long?"

"Alas, no," replied Sir Henry. "The shade of yonder painter fellow is always hanging around this place, and if he catches me out here he'll have me back on the canvas in less time than it takes to change horses at the Dolphin! Life's very flat on canvas!"

"What made you try so hard to get out of your frame?" asked Pamela, as if talking to

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a picture was the most natural thing in the world.

Sir Henry pointed to the wineglass standing on the table.

" 'Twas this Rhenish wine," he said. " By my troth, 'tis vile stuff. I would fain taste water for a change."

" I'll ring for Perkins," said Pamela, " and get him to fetch you a glass of water."

She was about to press the button when Sir Henry stopped her.

" Nay, good Mistress Pamela," he cried, his voice trembling with nervousness, " I must not be seen, or folk will say that Broad-acre Castle is haunted, and I shall be driven out from my ancestral hall."

" I'll go and fetch you some myself," said Pamela. " Oh, I forgot," she added, " I shall have to go to the kitchen, and the others will see me ; and you don't want them to know, do you ? "

" What, hast a well in the kitchen these days ? " asked Sir Henry, in tones of surprise. " In my time we always drew from a well in the courtyard, and sweet water it was, i' faith ! 'Tis a good drink of that I crave."

" Oh, but the well hasn't been used for

ages," replied Pamela, "not since the East Chalkshire Water Company laid a main through the village. The water must be horribly stale—it wouldn't be fit to drink."

"No water could be staler than that ill-flavoured Rhenish wine," retorted Sir Henry.

"Well, I'll get you a glassful, Sir Henry, and you can see if you like it," said Pamela, picking up the glass.

"Nay, good Mistress Pamela! A glassful, forsooth! Get me a hogshead, I prithee; I have a thirst like a furnace."

"I'm afraid I haven't a hogshead," said Pamela, putting down the glass. "Will a bucket do?"

"Aye, a bucket—'twill do well. And haste thee, Pamela, for I fear lest that shrewish aunt of thine may come downstairs, and find me here. Gadsooks! I should get a month's notice, like as did the others!"

Pamela hurried out of the room, and the ancestor, finding his legs less stiff, crossed to the bookshelves and looked at one or two of the books.

"By the king's beard!" he exclaimed, "'tis a strange book-learning for which folk have a taste these days!"

He hobbled back to his place by the table, where for a moment he stood, waiting. Then, all of a sudden, as if moved by an irresistible compulsion, he picked up his glass, moved behind the table, and stepped by way of the chair back into his frame. With something like a jerk he took up his familiar attitude, and remained there motionless as before.

A moment later Pamela entered. She was carrying a bucket in one hand and a corked bottle in the other.

"Well, I've got the water," she began brightly, "and it's as stale as stale can be—and full of frogs. But look what's come up in the bucket!" and she held up the bottle.

All at once she realised that Sir Henry de Murgatroyd was back in his frame.

"What—what have you gone back there for?" she asked, and her tone bespoke disappointment.

But the portrait did not vouchsafe any answer.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh, what a pity!" and she glanced at the bucket of water.

Evidently the bottle had excited her curiosity, for she held it up to the light and shook it. Then, with a great effort, she pulled out

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the cork. The bottle was empty—at least, there was no liquid in it, but attached to the cork was a piece of string, the other end of which was fastened to a screwed-up piece of paper inside the bottle. Pamela pulled the paper out by means of the string, laid it on the table, and smoothed it out.

“ Name of father, Gregory Rufus Charles Augustus, Count of Murgatroyd ; name of mother—— Why, this is a birth certificate ! ” she exclaimed. “ How funny ! ”

She seated herself again in the chair by the fire, and there was a puzzled expression on her face as she studied the document.

“ They were drowned when the ferry was run down,” she mused. “ This must have been their baby, who was drowned, too. How strange ! ‘ Pamela Murgatroyd ! ’ I always thought it was a boy ! Date of birth—why, that’s my birthday, too. I wonder . . . I wonder ! ”

CHAPTER XIII.

AUNT LOBELIA IS EXPOSED.

It was at this point that the curtain was drawn for one minute to represent the lapse of an hour. Ivy took the opportunity of stealing a peep at the audience.

That the play was holding their interest she felt certain. Most of the girls were watching eagerly for the curtain to part again, while a few were discussing in subdued whispers the probable trend of the plot.

Instinctively her eyes sought out the pallid face of Mlle. Frogart. It was, indeed, more pallid than ever, and Ivy couldn't help wondering if she felt ill. Once she noticed the French mistress glance towards the door as if measuring the distance she would have to go if she wished to leave the hall.

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"I hope Froggy's not going to faint," Ivy whispered to Mandy; "she's looking awfully white."

However, nothing of the kind happened, and as soon as the minute was up, the curtains again swung apart.

Pamela was still seated by the fire, but her head was resting on her arm. She was evidently asleep. Beside her stood Perkins, the butler, with a cup of coffee on a tray.

"Miss Pamela," he said.

But Pamela did not hear.

"Miss Pamela!" This time the butler shook her gently by the shoulder.

Pamela looked up drowsily, and yawned.

"There's a gentleman to see you, Miss Pamela," said the butler. "He's been waiting some time. I told him it wasn't convenient, but he said his business was most urgent, so I thought I'd better wake you. I've brought you a cup of coffee."

"That's very kind of you, Perkins," said Pamela, accepting the coffee gratefully and glancing round the room. The bottle and bucket had disappeared, and the blue curtain again concealed the portrait of the ancestor.

"Did you cover up Sir Henry?" she asked.

"Yes, miss," replied the butler. "Her ladyship always likes him to be covered up at night, because of the dust."

Somehow, Pamela did not like to ask what had become of the other things, so she picked up her caller's card from the tray in the most casual manner.

"Henry Dockett, of Messrs. Scrivener and Dockett," she read.

"The late count's solicitors," explained Perkins.

"Whatever can he want at this time of day?" asked Pamela.

"I don't know," replied the butler; "but he says it's very important. Shall I show him in, miss?"

"Yes, please; and bring another cup of coffee."

"Very good, miss."

The butler left the room and a moment later an elderly gentleman entered. He bore a really striking resemblance to the ancestor in the portrait, except that he was, of course, suitably dressed in modern clothes. The likeness had evidently struck Pamela, for without stopping to think, she exclaimed:

"Why, it's Sir Henry!"

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The elderly solicitor fairly purred at the compliment.

"Not Sir Henry yet, Miss Brooklyn," he said; "although one never knows—one never knows! Henry Dockett is my name, of the firm of Scrivener and Dockett, solicitors to the late count."

"Oh, indeed," said Pamela. "Won't you sit down? I've asked the butler to bring you a cup of coffee. You do take coffee, don't you?"

"Oh, that's very kind of you—very kind indeed," remarked the old gentleman, putting on his glasses. "I've really come to see you on important business—most important business."

"I suppose you want to see the countess—not me?" suggested Pamela.

"Yes, yes—the countess, of course. But you—you'll do even better, if I may say so."

"Now you're trying to flatter me," said Pamela, coyly.

"Not at all—not at all," replied the solicitor. "The fact is—well, let me explain. You will remember—at least, you will have heard—that the late count and countess and their only child, a baby girl, were drowned

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in the Millpool Ferry disaster, some fifteen or sixteen years ago, when only one passenger was saved."

"Yes, I know," interrupted Pamela. "It was my aunt Lobelia who was saved—the present countess."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Dockett, "and the man who rescued her—a boatman named Stockdale—died last month."

The solicitor paused, and Pamela waited, completely at a loss to know in what way she was concerned with the sad event. Her visitor felt in his pockets and produced some papers.

"Before he died," he continued, "he sent for the vicar and the doctor, and in their presence made a statement which I have here. The doctor wrote it down, and the old man signed it with a cross. It was to the effect that—well, I think I had better read it to you word for word. It hardly calls for any explanation. Here it is." He unfolded the papers he had taken from his pocket, turned over a few sheets, and began to read:

" ' I, William Stockdale, make this statement believing that I have not long to live. I am the waterman who went to the rescue of

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the Millpool Ferry when she was run down by the *Corduroy*. I saved two persons, one a woman and the other a baby. They stayed the night at my cottage. In the morning the woman offered me fifty pounds to say nothing about the child, but to give out that she was the only one I saved. I took the money. I never spent it. It is behind the loose brick in the chimney-corner. I want to leave it to the child, but I don't know what became of her. The woman took her away, and I never saw them again.' "

The solicitor folded the papers and put them back in his pocket. Pamela jumped up, excited.

"Why, this means—this means——" she exclaimed.

"That the present countess is not the real countess," said Mr. Dockett. "She's an impostor."

At this moment the butler entered with coffee for the visitor.

"Perkins, Perkins!" cried Pamela, unable to contain herself with excitement, "did you take anything out of this room while I was asleep just now—a bottle or anything?"

The butler looked puzzled.

"A bottle, miss? What sort of a bottle?"

"Oh, never mind what sort of a bottle. Did you take anything away?"

"No, miss! Certainly not, miss!"

"Then, Perkins, if you love me, run out to the courtyard and get me a bucket of water from the old well—quickly, please!"

"A bucket of water from the well, miss?" he exclaimed, bewildered. "I—I don't understand."

He glanced at Mr. Dockett, as if for confirmation of this strange request, but Mr. Dockett was equally at a loss.

"Do, please, do!" begged Pamela. "Never mind what I want it for. Bring the first bucketful that comes up. Hurry, Perkins, hurry!"

"Hadn't I better get the doctor, sir?" asked the butler, addressing Mr. Dockett.

"I think you'd better fetch the bucket of water first, as Miss Brooklyn asks," said the solicitor, realising that it was sometimes best to humour people.

"Very good, sir."

The butler left the room with the air of one who knows he is being sent on a fool's errand.

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"Don't think me presuming," said Mr. Dockett as soon as Perkins had gone, "but I'm completely at a loss to understand this peculiar request of yours. A bucket of water from the well?"

"I can't explain now," said Pamela. "Later on, perhaps. Oh, I do wish he'd hurry up!"

"Shall we proceed with the business?" ventured the solicitor.

"No, not yet—not yet. Wait."

There was a short pause. Ivy, from behind the curtains, once again stole a peep at the faces of the audience.

They were interested, there was no doubt of that. So interested, in fact, that they did not see Mlle. Frogart slip out of her place and leave the hall by the emergency door which was close to the end of the fourth row. But Ivy had seen. Indeed, she had half-expected it, and her fears were now confirmed; Mademoiselle was ill.

For a moment an inward struggle raged. Ivy was longing, as only a young author can long, to witness the successful finish of her play. But she could not bear to think of mademoiselle fainting in the corridor with

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not a soul to look after her. After all, the piece was going well; her presence was no longer essential. Indeed, of all people present she could best be spared. The next instant, without a word to anyone, she had slipped out of the hall by the platform door.

Meanwhile, on the stage, Pamela stood watching the door impatiently. Mr. Dockett looked at his watch, as if anxious to get on with the business in hand. Suddenly the door opened and the butler entered, carrying a bucket which he set down on the floor in front of the table.

"The water's all green, miss, and there's frogs in it," he said, in tones which implied disgust.

"Did—did anything else come up in the bucket?" asked Pamela, eagerly.

"Only this 'ere empty bottle, miss," replied the butler, picking the said article out of the bucket and holding it at arm's length.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Pamela. "Pull the cork out quickly, Perkins!"

The butler complied in the manner of one who has been called from the audience to assist a conjuror. Out came the cork, and, attached to the cork, a piece of string, and

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attached to the string a screwed-up piece of paper.

Pamela sprang forward and seized the paper. Feverishly, her fingers untied the string and smoothed out the crumpled sheet.

"It is! It is!" she cried. "It's my birth certificate!" and she held it out for Mr. Dockett to see.

"Your birth certificate!" exclaimed both the others at once.

"Then it is as I thought," declared the solicitor. "This is the evidence I was wanting. You, Miss Brooklyn, are the baby who was rescued from the ferry. You are the Countess of Murgatroyd!"

"Oh, then my father wasn't disowned by grandfather, and he didn't go to Canada and die penniless on a lonely ranch?"

"Nothing of the kind," said the solicitor. "Who told you that?"

"Auntie. She said that was how I came to be her ward."

"I think," said Mr. Dockett, "I should like to interview your aunt. Can I see her now?"

"She's gone to bed," said Pamela.

"Oh, well, I daresay she can be induced to come downstairs in view of the importance

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of the business we have to discuss. Would your ladyship mind sending for her?"

Pamela rang the bell, and the maid entered.

"Rosalie," commanded the new countess, "go to my aunt's room, please, and tell her I wish to speak to her at once. Insist on her coming, whether she wishes to or not. Perkins, you had better go with Rosalie in case there is trouble."

Rosalie and the butler left the room with surprising alacrity, and while they were gone Mr. Dockett took the opportunity to congratulate the new countess on her dramatic change of fortune.

"I feel awfully sorry for auntie," confessed Pamela. "She's got so used to being countess, you see. It'll come very hard on her to have to go back to being just a relative of the countess." •

"I doubt if she's even that," began the solicitor; but before he could say more a scuffle of feet outside and the loud protesting voice of Pamela's aunt, announced the fact the Rosalie and Perkins were complying with instructions.

"Insolence! Mutiny!" exclaimed the "countess," striding into the room. "Never

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in all my life have I suffered such indignity ! To be fetched out of bed by main force, and carried downstairs by a butler and a maid—it is unheard of, atrocious ! I demand an explanation and an apology ! ”

In her dressing-gown, and with her hair done in a series of tight plaits all round her head, the “ countess ” did not look anything like as dignified as before she went to bed.

“ I sent for you, auntie,” announced Pamela, “ because Mr. Dockett wishes to see you at once on very important business.”

“ Oh ! ” sniffed her aunt. “ And who, pray, is Mr. Dockett ? ”

The solicitor bowed.

“ I am a partner in the firm of Scrivener and Dockett—solicitors to the late count,” he said. “ I am speaking, I believe, to Miss Eliza Trumlock ? ”

A look of apprehension came over the countess’s face.

“ Trumlock ? Trumlock ? ” she exclaimed, in pretended indignation. “ I am the Countess of Murgatroyd. How dare you call me Trumlock ? ”

The solicitor picked up the birth certificate from the table.

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"Have you seen this before?" he asked.

The countess started guiltily.

"Pamela's birth certificate!" she cried, and then, as the desperateness of her position began to dawn upon her: "Oh, what shall I do?" she wailed. "You have found me out!"

"Yes," said the solicitor. "We have found you out. You are an impostor. My lady," he added, turning to Pamela, "you have only to say the word and Eliza Trumlock here shall be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law."

With a cry of dismay Miss Trumlock threw herself at Pamela's feet and caught her hand.

"Oh, don't do that! Don't do that!" she pleaded. "Send me away, and I will never trouble you again, but don't let me go to prison!"

"She'd get three years, at least," observed Mr. Dockett.

"No, no! We won't send her to prison," said Pamela. "I have a better plan than that. Upstairs, in my bedroom, I have a pile of stockings waiting to be darned, and I shall want lots of new clothes, now that I'm a countess. There'll be enough work to keep

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Miss Trumlock busy—very busy—for months and months—— ”

“ But,” exclaimed Mr. Dockett, interrupting, “ she’s guilty of a serious crime, and ought to be punished.”

“ Exactly,” said Pamela, resting her hand reassuringly on the head of the kneeling figure. “ But her punishment will be to stay with me and see how a *real* countess behaves to a penniless needlewoman.”

* * * * *

The play was over. As the curtains swung together a burst of applause filled the hall. One by one the artistes came before the curtain and made their bow, and then the mistresses in the fourth row started to call for the author. Beryl and Marion searched for Ivy in the wings. but without result, and after a while, as the author did not appear, it was assumed that she was either too nervous or too modest to do so.

A word of thanks from Miss Tonks brought the proceedings to a close, and, laughing and chatting, the girls tramped out of the hall and dispersed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECRET OF THE WELL.

When Ivy slipped out of the hall she looked up and down the corridor, but there was no sign of mademoiselle. For a moment she wondered which way the French mistress might have gone. She looked in the library and in the mistresses' common-room, but there was no one there, and it occurred to her that perhaps she had gone in search of water. In that event she would probably go to the kitchen, which was nearest, and on the same floor.

Ivy hurried to the kitchen. It was in darkness, and she felt for the switch ; but before

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she could find it her attention was attracted by a glimmer of light outside the window.

For a while she watched it curiously. Then she crossed to the casement and looked out.

It was a dark night, for the moon was not yet up, but at the far side of the courtyard, and close to the old well, which had been Ivy's inspiration for her play, an electric torch cast a round disc of light upon the flagstones. By the dimly reflected glimmer of the torch Ivy could just make out a human figure. There was only one person that it could be.

Ivy returned to the door and switched on the light.

As she did so, Mlle. Frogart turned a startled face towards the window and immediately put out her torch.

With the kitchen light streaming across the yard Ivy opened the outer door and crossed to where the French mistress was standing.

"What do you want, you leetle sneak? Why do you follow me always?" demanded Mademoiselle, angrily.

"I thought perhaps you were feeling faint,"

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said Ivy. "I came to see if you needed any help."

Mlle. Frogart changed her tactics.

"You are right," she said; "I had ze *migraïne*. I came out for ze fresh air. I was looking for a place to sit down."

She put her hand to her head as if about to swoon. Ivy, despite a vague feeling of suspicion as to the genuineness of mademoiselle's explanation, took her arm and helped her towards the door.

"Hadn't you better come in and sit down?" said Ivy. "Let me get you some water."

The French mistress allowed herself to be led into the kitchen and seated in the cook's wicker chair. Ivy brought her a glass of water, which she sipped slowly. After a while she said: "I am better, *merci bien*! You must go back to ze concert."

"I think it's over now," replied Ivy, as a buzz of voices sounded in the corridor in increasing volume. The next minute Jane, accompanied by Maud and Emily, entered the kitchen.

As they entered, Mlle. Frogart rose from her chair and left the room.

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"Lor', Miss Ivy!" exclaimed the cook. "They've been looking for you all over the place. Wherever did you get to?"

"I came to look after mademoiselle," said Ivy. "She's been feeling faint."

"Been feeling faint, 'as she?" remarked the cook, whose relations with mademoiselle were not of the friendliest kind. "Queer sort o' place to come when you're feeling faint—a 'ot kitchen like this."

"I found her in the yard, and brought her in here," explained Ivy. "She'd gone out there for a breath of air."

"Gone out in the yard—by herself?" exclaimed Emily.

"I wouldn't go out in that there yard by myself after dark for a pension!" declared the cook.

"Nor I," said Maud.

"Why?" asked Ivy. "Have you seen anything lately?"

"Yes; last night," came a chorus of voices.

"It's right enough that the yard's 'aunted," said the cook. "Whenever there's a bit o' moon about eleven o'clock, you can see a shimmering white thing walkin' up an' down

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on them there flags. We tried to catch it one night, didn't we, Emily? But it got away over the wall."

At this point, Mandy, who had been looking everywhere for Ivy, put her head round the door.

"Oh, there you are, are you!" she exclaimed. "We've been hunting for you all over the place. Tonky wants you in the dressing-room."

As they hurried along the corridor together, Ivy explained in a few words why she had been absent from the end of the performance. Mandy was indignant.

"Froggy's an old pig," she exclaimed. "I don't believe she felt faint at all. She's just jealous of you, Ivy—that's what it is!"

Miss Tonks was waiting in the dressing-room to congratulate the producer, and to tell her how completely successful the entertainment had been.

"I'm glad everyone enjoyed it," said Ivy, "and we should like to get up another next term, if you wouldn't mind."

The headmistress hesitated. Ought the girls to know that in all probability there would be no "next term" for St. Meredith's?

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After all, the school had not yet had definite notice to quit; perhaps it was a little premature to say anything about it.

"I think it would be an excellent idea," she said; "but, of course, it's rather early yet to talk about next term."

The few minutes that remained until supper-time were occupied in dismantling the stage as far as possible.

"Won't the evenings seem dull now this is over!" remarked Beryl, as the work proceeded.

"I don't know," said Ivy. "Don't forget we haven't caught that ghost yet!"

"Oh, I'd forgotten all about the ghost! I thought we'd given it up as a bad job!"

"I haven't!" declared Ivy. "And if you and the others are game we're going to have another hunt in the courtyard to-morrow night."

"Why not to-night?" asked Beryl.

"Well, I want to see Morrison first," replied her chum, mysteriously.

"Morrison! What's he got to do with it?" exclaimed Beryl, puzzled to know in what way the groundsman was concerned in the matter.

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Ivy merely replied: "You'll see," and almost immediately afterwards the supper-bell rang.

In the dormitory that night the only topic of conversation was the concert, so that Ivy was not called upon to detail her plans for the following day. Her own mind, however, was made up, and she was firmly resolved to sift the matter to the bottom. She felt fairly certain that the others, if only for the sake of excitement, would back up her proposal. And so nothing more was said about it until shortly after the retiring bell had gone the following evening, when the other occupants of Dormitory Nineteen were astonished to see Ivy stagger into the room with an enormous bundle tied up in sacking.

"Whatever have you got there?" demanded Marion.

"Have you caught the ghost?" asked Beryl.

"No," said Ivy; "but we're going to."

She unfastened the sacking, and displayed a bundle of strong netting.

"It's one of the practice nets," she explained. "I borrowed it from Morrison. He couldn't think what on earth I wanted it

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for, and I didn't tell him, of course. I believe he imagines it's for charades."

"What are you going to do with it?" inquired Rita.

"We're going to catch the ghost—to-night," replied Ivy. "We'll hide under the wall, where it's darkest, two at each end of the net, and when the ghost appears——"

"How d'you know it will?" asked Barbara.

"I don't know for certain, of course," admitted Ivy; "but cook seems to think it will, and she knows more about it than anyone. She says it walks in the yard every moonlight night, between eleven and twelve."

The others, now that the concert was over, had already begun to feel a longing for fresh activity, and they were all eager to join the expedition.

"Rita and Beryl can come my end," said Ivy, "and Marion and Barbara the other. We'll keep perfectly quiet in the shadows till the ghost gets well into the middle of the yard, and then, when I say 'go,' we'll all spring forward and throw the net over its head."

"I believe you know who it is!" said Marion.

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"No, I don't," replied Ivy; "but I've got a suspicion."

The others pressed her to say who it was she suspected; but Ivy would not give herself away.

"I'll tell you afterwards, if I'm right," she said.

It was not considered safe to start out much before eleven, and the five girls spent the intervening time sitting on Ivy's bed and chatting in subdued whispers.

"We never heard any more about the school being sold up," observed Marion.

"No," said Ivy. "But did you notice last night how Tonky said it was early yet to think about next term?"

"Yes," put in Beryl; "I thought it funny. She's usually so keen on 'looking ahead.' Do you think that's what it was?"

Ivy nodded.

"I'm sure of it," she said. "We've not heard a word about next term yet, and there can't be any other reason."

At a quarter to eleven the others seemed so impatient to make a start that Ivy decided to risk it. Carrying the net between them, they opened the door, ever so gingerly, and

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crept silently along the dark corridor and down the back stairs. Each girl took gym shoes in her hand, to put on when they reached the yard.

They groped their way to the kitchen, and Ivy, who was leading, turned the handle of the door and walked stealthily in. A crescent moon was just appearing over the wall of the courtyard, lighting up the room with a dim and ghostly light. In Indian file the little company crossed to the outer door, where they paused for a moment while Ivy gave a few final words of instruction before emerging into the yard.

"Whatever you do, don't make a sound," she whispered. "We'll go straight over to the wall, where it's darkest, and we'll unfold the net and get it ready. Then we'll squat down in the shadow and wait."

They filed out into the courtyard and crossed over to the wall. In a few seconds the net was unfolded, and Marion and Barbara placed in charge at one end, while Ivy, with Beryl and Rita to assist her, took up a position near the disused well.

A fresh breeze was stirring the tops of the trees behind them, but in the courtyard itself

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the air was still. Crouching in the shadows, the girls waited patiently for the ghost to put in an appearance.

Five minutes passed, then ten, fifteen, twenty. Something like a sigh of impatience reached Ivy from the other side of the net.

"Shut up!" she whispered. "We've a long time to wait yet."

Almost as she spoke a slight sound, as of a lifted latch, arrested their attention. The girls held their breath, and waited in tense expectation.

All at once, there appeared round the corner of the science wing, a shrouded figure, moving slowly with a gliding motion towards the flagged courtyard. On it came, smoothly and silently, an eerie, ghostly object. Great round hollows marked the places where its eyes should be, and gave a gruesome, deathly appearance to its chalk-white face. One pale hand gripped the shroud in which it was wound, while the other was outstretched, palm upwards, as if in supplication.

Watching with a kind of fascinated horror, the girls almost forgot the part they had to play, until the clear, firm voice of their leader uttered the command, "Go!"

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At once five figures leapt from the shadows and, dragging the net between them, made for the spot where the ghost stood. Ivy, on the extreme left, in trying to avoid entangling Beryl in the net, jumped to one side, and landed with all her weight on the worm-eaten cover of the disused well. Before the others could realise what had happened, the moss-covered boards had given way, and Ivy, with a frightened cry, had disappeared from sight.

Beryl, hearing her chum's cry, dropped the net and ran to her assistance. Marion and Barbara, at the other end of the net, were too intent upon capturing their quarry to take any notice of Ivy's calls for help. As they swept forward, the ghost, completely surprised, hesitated for a moment, and then turned and started to run. Marion, however, intercepted its flight and with a dexterous throw sent the net over its head. Completely enmeshed, the ghost sank to the ground with something like a sob.

"Who is it?" asked Barbara excitedly.

Rita and Marion bent down and examined the prostrate form.

"It looks like Froggy," said Marion.
"Where's Ivy? She's got the torch."

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"Help! Help!" came Beryl's distracted voice from a few yards away. "Ivy's fallen down the well!"

"Ivy's what?" cried Marion, running to the scene of the trouble.

"Fallen down the well!" wailed Beryl. "The boards gave way and let her in. Ivy, are you much hurt?"

"No," came Ivy's voice from the depths; "not much."

"Can you keep afloat?"

"There's no water down here; it's quite dry," replied Ivy. "I've fallen on to a heap of rubbish, but it's too far down for me to get out."

"Whatever shall we do?" said Beryl.

"Don't worry. We'll get her out all right," replied Marion; "all we want is a rope."

"There's one in the gym," observed Beryl; "but I don't know where else there is one. What about calling Morrison?"

Rita, acting on her own initiative, had dashed indoors for help, leaving Barbara in sole charge of their capture. While Beryl and Marion were still debating what to do, she reappeared at the door, accompanied by Miss Tonks herself. Almost at the same moment

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Jane and her colleagues, aroused by the noise, came trooping through the kitchen and out into the yard.

Miss Tonks hurried across to the well.

"She's all right," explained Marion. "That is, she's not badly hurt, and the well's dry. But we don't know how to get her out."

A look of relief came over the Headmistress's face, rapidly changing to one of severity.

"However did you come to be out here, at this hour?" she demanded. "There can be no possible excuse this time."

"We've caught the ghost," replied Marion, triumphantly, pointing to where Barbara was standing guard over the prostrate figure.

"Caught the ghost!"

Miss Tonks crossed to the spot where Barbara stood beside a pile of sheets and netting. In the light which flooded the courtyard from the kitchen window it was apparent that the form at her feet was that of the French mistress. Evidently she had fainted.

"Undo that netting and the sheet," commanded Miss Tonks. "Emily, run to my study and fetch the sal volatile. Jane, you look after mademoiselle while I see what is to be done about Ivy."

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"If the well isn't too steep, miss, there's Morrison's garden-ladder just over the wall," said Jane.

Without waiting for instructions, Beryl and Marion ran to the wall, and, scrambling over, returned with the ladder in question.

"Ladder coming down," shouted Beryl.

Ivy switched on her light, and the ladder was lowered slowly into the well.

"D'you want any help?" inquired Marion.

"No, thanks," replied Ivy, as somewhat painfully she began her upward climb. Beryl was quick to notice that she was using only her left hand.

"What's the matter with your other arm?" she inquired. "Have you hurt it?"

Ivy's head appeared above the ground.

"No," she replied, jocularly; "I'm only bringing my trunk with me!" and she hoisted over the edge a large iron deed-box fastened with two leather straps.

Mlle. Frogart, in the meantime, had recovered from her faint. She was standing supported by Maud and Emily, and gazing about her in a dazed manner. The sight of the iron box, however, seemed to restore her suddenly and completely to her senses.

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"Zat is mine!" she cried, rushing forward and trying to snatch the box away from the cook, who was handing it to Miss Tonks.

"Yours, mademoiselle?" queried the Headmistress, in tones of astonishment. "Whatever is a box of yours doing in the well?"

"I 'id it there for safety," cried Mlle. Frogart. "It is ver' precious! Give it me; it is mine!"

"I'm afraid I must know what it contains," said Miss Tonks, calmly. "You know it is against the rules of St. Meredith's to bring any valuables to the school without informing the Headmistress. Jane, will you please unfasten those straps?"

Mlle. Frogart made a desperate attempt to wrench the box from the cook, who was hanging on to it tenaciously; but Maud and Emily came to Jane's assistance, and held the French mistress back. The next minute, despite mademoiselle's protests, the lid of the box was lifted and the Headmistress bent over to examine its contents.

"Why, they're the deeds!" she exclaimed, "the lost deeds of St. Meredith's!"

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For a moment Mlle. Frogart stood speechless. Then she burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she wailed. "Monsieur Humphrey; he will kill me!"

"Mr. Humphrey?" replied Miss Tonks. "What have you to do with Mr. Humphrey?"

"He sent me here," sobbed mademoiselle. "Monsieur Humphrey sent me to guard ze box. Oh, what shall I do? When he hears you have found it he will kill me!"

"I'm sure he won't," said Miss Tonks. "You had better place yourself under police protection. I'll ring up Superintendent Fowler in the morning; no doubt you can give him some useful information about Mr. Humphrey. As for the deeds, their discovery means so much to St. Meredith's that I can scarcely believe my eyes!"

"Does it mean that the school won't be sold up, after all?" inquired Marion, eagerly.

Miss Tonks rounded upon her in surprise.

"What do you know about the school's being sold up?" she demanded.

"I heard you telling Miss Rawlins about it that first day on the launch," said Marion,

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fidgiting. "We started to look for the day but we gave it up as a bad job."

"Well, they're found now," replied Headmistress; "and our anxieties are at rest. This is indeed a red-letter day at St. Meredith's. We must find some suitable way of celebrating it."

And that is why, one sunny Friday, October, the streets of Little Shelby were bright with the colours of St. Meredith and the woods behind the village echoed with the voices of picnicking schoolgirls. It ought, according to the school calendar, to have been hard at work.

